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ISSUE
417

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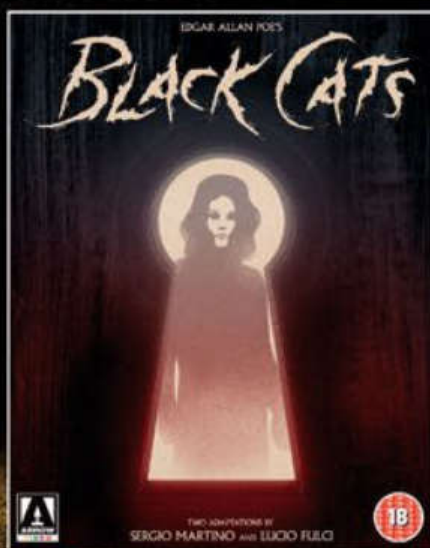
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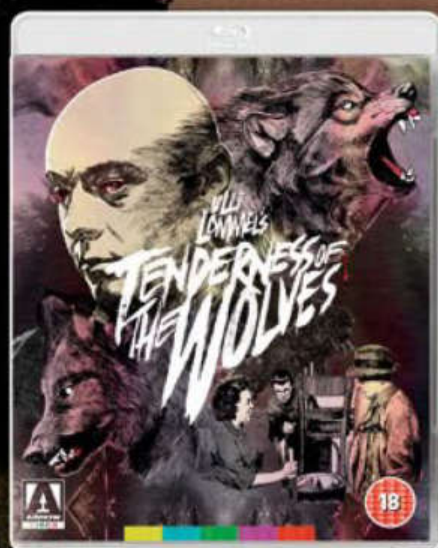
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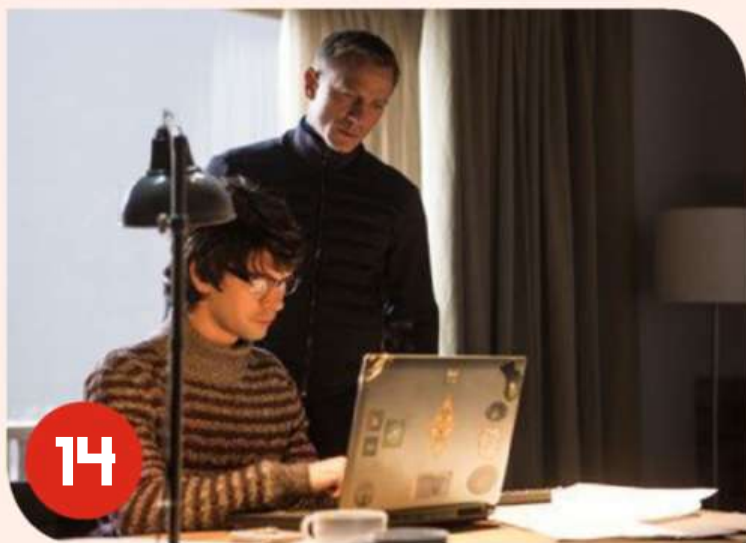
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 417!

So after 44 years they are back. The biggest bad guys in the James Bond universe – S.P.E.C.T.R.E. Back in the sixties and seventies, Bond failed to permanently defeat them, instead it was left to a bunch of suits and a convoluted rights issue to plunge them into limbo seemingly never to return. Happily the legals have been resolved in time for them to be reborn into the rebooted Bond mythology currently spearheaded by the goblin-eared Daniel Craig (apologies for the cover by the way, I swear they have not been retouched). The pop culture impact of Ernst Stavro Blofeld and his hi-tech goon squad has expanded much in the years they have been away, and it will be interesting to see how they will fare in this post *Austin Powers* world. We have a look at what we can expect, plus some more Bond info for gaming fans. It's still my favourite franchise, and it's great to have an excuse to feature it once again.

We also cast a watchful gaze over *Thunderbirds* and the 50th anniversary of this fantasy favourite, including a look at what went wrong when they arrived on the big screen.

Drifting back to the real 21st century, we look forward to the upcoming tv seasons of *Gotham*, *The Walking Dead*, *Arrow*, and *The Flash*. On the larger screen we preview *Pan*, *The Martian*, and the return of del Toro with *Crimson Peak* (yet another del Toro title open to many a double entendre).

But do not panic, despite all of this monster-sized content, we have managed (as always) to squeeze in all of your favourite columns. It's a bargain. A veritable treasure trove. Absolutely the best purchase you can ever make in your entire life. [Pause for breath]

Almost forgot, we have a new website www.starburstmagazine.com – Let us know if you like it, otherwise maybe best you keep it to yourself.

Even though the *STARBURST Radio Show* is on it's summer break. Myself @JordanMRoyce, Martin @liverecs and Shauna @shaunathegrinch are still kicking around on Twitter, plus there may well be surprise Podcasts on iTunes.

Until next issue, keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce
EDITOR



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STAR

THE MOFFAT SHOW

'It's time to put on make-up. It's time to light the lights. It's time to meet the Muppets on the Moffat show tonight.' That sentiment, however sad, just about sums up my feeling toward what DR WHO has become under Moffat. I don't know what show Moffat was watching when he was growing up but what he has produced since becoming 'Show runner' has nothing in common with the show I knew and loved.

His own definitions of the show demonstrate how far his ideas stray from the concept.

A fairytale? No, science fiction. A madman with a box? Surely a scientist with a time machine!

Clearly Moffat is an overrated 'one trick pony' and that trick has well and truly been done to death. But then how many times did Rory die and come back. Reality has no place in Moffat's world and without reality how can there

possibly be drama?

Sadly being a genius in his own perception Moffat will never leave the show he has thoroughly impregnated with his own special brand of poison. His bloated ego would never allow anybody to do it better. And let's face it with some of the dire barrel scrapings we've been served up that 'anybody' could be any third rate hack.

Paul Mount pretty much nailed my feelings towards the 'Moffat show', had Dr Who started in this way it is unlikely it would have survived its first year. Fortunately for us it was produced by genuinely creative people so we will always have the back catalogue to enjoy, and nothing Moffat can do will ever change that.

Shaun C, via EMAIL

We thought the article may be a little contentious but it seems many of our readers agree with your opinion too!

LETTER

GIMME THE GOODIES

A copy of your magazine was in my goody bag for Nine Worlds Geekfest 2015. What a great magazine! I like the articles, news, columns and the strange comic strip - it's really weird, that's a good thing! Even the reviews are of strange things! You seem to cover everything geek. What a good idea to give it to people at a Geekfest.

Thank you, all of you (there's a lot of you who put it together).

Dave, via EMAIL

We welcome you joyfully to our fold! #WeirdoForever

LET HE WHO IS WITHOUT SIN PODCAST THE FIRST STONE

I was reading STARBURST #416 - which was a great issue, when it dawned on me that there is a gaping hole in your magazine. Sure, you cover the films, books, TV shows we all love, and the games, comics, audio recordings, cosplay and soundtrack albums: But how come so little coverage of some of the great genre podcasts

that are out there (and mostly all for free)? Most of them have really high production standards and are ongoing series in their own right. Some based on already established universes like DOCTOR WHO or the STAR TREK shows out there that are lovingly crafted by fans and at times rival the originals for quality. Yep, you had a mini review of the NIGHT VALE book - but what of the actual show? I am sure there are plenty of podcasts that I am not aware of as well... so how about it? A regular page or two dedicated to the overlooked medium of genre podcasts? All the best,

Cerebus, via EMAIL

Interesting idea, Cerebus! STARBURST are big fans of podcasts too, so much so that we want less rather than more as there is not enough time to listen to all of the awesome stuff out there, #TooMuchPodcasts.

To be authentic to the medium, if we were to do it, it should perhaps not be a column in

the magazine but be a new audio show, the STARBURST podcast-podcast!

EUROSTAR

I've read the feedback to my letter by a distressed Belgian Whovian in STARBURST #415. The addition of the photo of JCVD to our letters was very funny. Well, he's still the most famous Belgian actor in Hollywood, outside Matthias Schoenaerts maybe - who appears often in French & British movies, so technically speaking that's not Hollywood. I hope to see him in a Marvel production. He could have been ROBOCOP if he had accepted the role. I'm not his biggest fan but at least he's doing something. It's about time that more Belgian actors appear in international movies. I've never visited Van Damme's statue, though, since I rarely visit Brussels but maybe I will someday ...

The dutch don't seem to have problems starring in Hollywood movies (Famke Janssen, Rutger Hauer, Jeroen Krabbé ...) so I wonder why not more Belgian actors make it abroad. Jan Declair was offered roles in a James Bond movie and EYES WIDE SHUT after starring in the Oscar-for-Best-Foreign-Film winning dutch movie KARAKTER (1997) but he... refused! He admitted in an interview he was intimidated but flattered.

My warmest regards,
Yves "Kapeles" Albrechts,
from BELGIUM

Now that you mention it, none spring to mind for us either... but it is hard to shine in the shadow of your national hero - Jean-Claude Van Damme.

Seriously though, more European stars in Hollywood is something we are all for, especially in genre films! The same actors get reused over and over, it's nice to see less recognisable faces in big roles sometimes, especially long running franchises. There seems to have been a wave of Aussie actors hitting the big time recently, but I'm sure there's plenty of great talent in Brussels, maybe it will be the new flavour of the month! It's gotta be a sweeter one than the vegetable version!

WATCH THIS SPACE

Have you thought about doing a STAR TREK; or a Space adventure special featuring DARK MATTER, THE 100, VOYAGER etc.

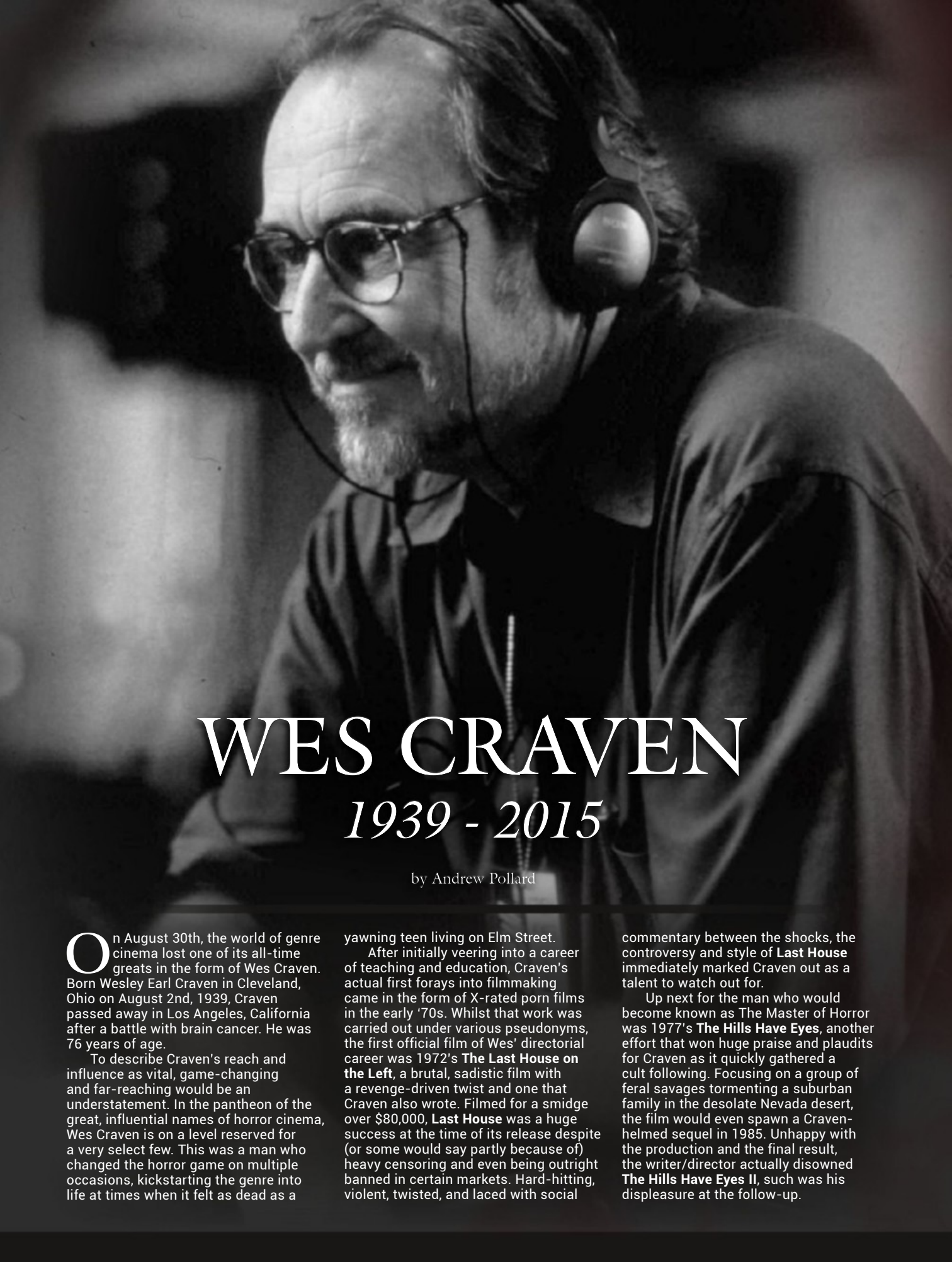
THE 100 is an amazing show I have high hopes for it and am looking forward to its third season soon, usually all shows I get into get cancelled like STARGATE UNIVERSE. THE 100 is just as great as THE WALKING DEAD and LOST.

I hope there will be plenty of STAR TREK BEYOND coverage in the magazine next year, because the writing in the mag is amazing and I don't know how you do it.

Keep up the great work
Martin Revitt, via EMAIL

It will be full speed ahead on the STAR TREK themed issue, but a little closer to the time of the BEYOND release. Hopefully we won't have to wait quite as long for the new season of THE 100, it's a show we've been enjoying as much as you! But in the meantime, to quench your sci-fi thirst, you can turn to page 52 in this issue for a DARK MATTER feature!





WES CRAVEN

1939 - 2015

by Andrew Pollard

On August 30th, the world of genre cinema lost one of its all-time greats in the form of Wes Craven. Born Wesley Earl Craven in Cleveland, Ohio on August 2nd, 1939, Craven passed away in Los Angeles, California after a battle with brain cancer. He was 76 years of age.

To describe Craven's reach and influence as vital, game-changing and far-reaching would be an understatement. In the pantheon of the great, influential names of horror cinema, Wes Craven is on a level reserved for a very select few. This was a man who changed the horror game on multiple occasions, kickstarting the genre into life at times when it felt as dead as a

yawning teen living on Elm Street.

After initially veering into a career of teaching and education, Craven's actual first forays into filmmaking came in the form of X-rated porn films in the early '70s. Whilst that work was carried out under various pseudonyms, the first official film of Wes' directorial career was 1972's **The Last House on the Left**, a brutal, sadistic film with a revenge-driven twist and one that Craven also wrote. Filmed for a smidge over \$80,000, **Last House** was a huge success at the time of its release despite (or some would say partly because of) heavy censoring and even being outright banned in certain markets. Hard-hitting, violent, twisted, and laced with social

commentary between the shocks, the controversy and style of **Last House** immediately marked Craven out as a talent to watch out for.

Up next for the man who would become known as The Master of Horror was 1977's **The Hills Have Eyes**, another effort that won huge praise and plaudits for Craven as it quickly gathered a cult following. Focusing on a group of feral savages tormenting a suburban family in the desolate Nevada desert, the film would even spawn a Craven-helmed sequel in 1985. Unhappy with the production and the final result, the writer/director actually disowned **The Hills Have Eyes II**, such was his displeasure at the follow-up.

Sandwiched between the two **Hills** movies were made-for-TV efforts and a few non-directing gigs for Craven, although he'd also tackle a long-standing genre fave property with 1982's **Swamp Thing**. Giving Wes another chance to revisit the familiar theme of characters tying in directly with their landscape and surroundings, **Swamp Thing** was another well-received movie and another one that would go on to achieve a cult following as it gave a decent showing of the DC Comics' character.

Having now amassed a reputation for a certain style, tone and a unique ability to scratch on certain aspects of real life with his work, 1984 saw Wes Craven create one of his most notable and vital works. That film, of course, was **A Nightmare on Elm Street**. Creating a modern horror icon in the form of the child-slaying, charred-skinned, fedora-adorned Freddy Krueger, Craven really did give audiences something that was the stuff of nightmares. In the list of iconic modern horror characters, Freddy is on a list along with the likes of Michael Myers, Jason Voorhees, Candyman and Ash Williams as figures who were to their time and beyond what the likes of Dracula, The Mummy, Frankenstein's monster and The Wolf Man were to the black and white Golden Age of horror cinema. Simply put, with **A Nightmare on Elm Street**, Wes Craven created a genuine horror juggernaut... and one that essentially saved New Line Cinema, which was from then on out known as 'the house that Freddy built'. So popular were the sadistic antics of Freddy Krueger that Craven's '84 movie spawned a further six films, a crossover with **Friday the 13th's** Jason, a TV show, a 2010 remake - and there's even *another* remake in development at the moment. In terms of Craven's involvement, he'd serve as an executive producer and writer on 1987's **A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors** and would return to direct, write, executive produce and even play himself in 1994's **Wes Craven's New Nightmare**, which was a welcome return to form and a fitting send-off for the franchise's initial run after suffering from several so-so entries over the years.

Again mixing his cinematic work



up with some TV output, Craven would helm made-for-TV efforts like **Invitation to Hell** and **Chiller** and even oversee some episodes of famed genre show **The Twilight Zone**. Further props would come Wes' way for cinematic efforts like 1988's **Serpent and the Rainbow** and 1989's **Shocker**, both of which were written and directed by Craven and which only served to add more numbers to his ever-growing fanbase. Then came the hugely enjoyable, eerie, and satirical **People Under the Stairs** in 1991; giving a skewed and intelligent look at greed, power, and the rich tormenting and holding down the impoverished, all lavished with a tinge of wit and lashings of horror.

Whilst the 1995 Eddie Murphy-starring **Vampire in Brooklyn** was met with mass negativity, 1996 would see Wes Craven reignite the horror genre with **Scream**. Managing to reinvent the slasher movie whilst also referencing and poking fun at the subgenre itself, **Scream** was a revelation and saw horror fans both old and new championing it, becoming almost the signature film

of a new generation of horror fans and filmmakers-in-waiting. 1997 and 2000 saw Craven helm **Scream 2** and **Scream 3**, respectively, and The Master of Horror would return to the franchise with **Scream 4** in 2011. In fact, Wes had recently been acting as an executive producer on MTV's awful-yet-somehow-engaging **Scream: The TV Series** that has just aired in the US. In the last decade or so of his career, Craven tinkered with efforts like **Cursed** and **My Soul to Take**, even working on some graphic novels, but it's for his game-changing work of previous decades that he's most fondly remembered and revered.

To date, 2015 has seen far too many genre favourites take their final bows. From Sir Christopher Lee to Leonard Nimoy, Terry Pratchett to Geoffrey Lewis, 'Rowdy' Roddy Piper to Yvonne Craig, and many more in between. Each special to a wide range of people in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons, and each just as tragic a loss as the other, these fallen genre names of 2015 now see the iconic and truly legendary Wes Craven added to their ranks. It's a sad time for fans of horror and of cinema in general, but it's also a timely reminder of just how great the genre can be when delivered correctly. Wesley Earl Craven knew how to engage, enthrall and elicit genuine emotion from his audience, and he goes down as one of horror's greatest minds. Clever, witty, humorous, thought-provoking and legitimately terrifying, Craven's body of work is one to be marvelled with and one that will continue to influence and entertain generations to come.

The thoughts of all here at **STARBURST** go out to the family, friends and fans of the great Wes Craven. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you for the Nightmares, sir.



THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS



With the anticipation for **Star Wars: The Force Awakens** reaching near fever pitch, any new nugget of info or image is leaped upon. We had, of course, 'Force Friday' - a day in which toy shops were inundated by middle-aged men (and women, obviously!) looking to throw their money at the tellers to expand their collection of toys based on the story from a galaxy far, far, away. While many people left disappointed that they all couldn't get their grubby mitts on the remote control BB-8 or the Millennium Falcon drone, we did get a treat of this spiffing Drew Struzan poster from Disney's answer to Comic-Con, D23. With Harrison Ford's Han Solo joining the now-familiar characters Finn (John Boyega), Rey (Daisy Ridley) and Kyla Ren (Adam Driver), the iconic artist's work is always a pleasure to



view. Not long after, another collage emerged with Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew) seen posed next to Finn, Oscar Isaac's Poe Dameron in full rebel gear, and a pair of familiar droids attempting to upstage BB-8.

We also got confirmation that Colin Trevorrow will be directing **Episode IX**, and the first cast photo of **Rogue One** was shared, with an impressive list of names added to the film including Felicity Jones, Mads Mikkelsen, Ben Mendelsohn, Alan Tudyk, Diego Luna, Forest Whitaker, Donnie Yen, Jiang Wen and Riz Ahmed. Directed by Gareth Edwards, the first of the anthology films (that now go under the subtitle **A Star Wars Story**) will be unleashed on December 16th, 2016, while The Force will be Awakened on December 17th this year (a whole day earlier than we expected!)

MARVEL

Despite us being on a break from the Marvel Cinematic Universe until next May's **Captain America: Civil War**, things are still rumbling along in the world of the MCU, not least where Cap's next big screen outing is concerned.

With **Civil War** set to see heroes take sides as Captain America and Iron Man do battle, some leaked promo art has seemingly revealed just which heroes will be taking which side come next year. Lining up alongside Chris Evans' Steve Rogers will be Anthony Mackie's Falcon, Jeremy Renner's Hawkeye, Sebastian Stan's Winter

Soldier, Paul Rudd's Ant-Man and Emily VanCamp's Agent 13. As for those standing alongside Robert Downey Jr.'s Tony Stark, the surreptitious art reveals that Don Cheadle's War Machine, Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow, Paul Bettany's Vision and Chadwick Boseman's debuting Black Panther will join up with Iron Man. It's also believed that Tom Holland's Spider-Man, another making his MCU bow in **Civil War**, will initially be siding with the Armored Avenger too. One name notable by his absence is Mark Ruffalo's Hulk, although the actor has recently claimed that the powers-that-be have decided to remove the Green Goliath from the movie completely in order to

elongate the mystery over just where Bruce Banner is and what he's up to. The character was last seen, of course, on a one-way trip to self-imposed isolation at the conclusion of **Avengers: Age of Ultron**. To be directed by Anthony and Joe Russo, **Captain America: Civil War** is set for a May 6th, 2016 release.

Elsewhere in the MCU, Scott Derrickson's **Doctor Strange** is in talks to add Hannibal's Mads Mikkelsen to its ranks. No exact details are known on the role lined up for Mikkelsen, although it's said to be that of a mystery villain who will be aligned with Chiwetel Ejiofor's Baron Mordo. If Mikkelsen does indeed end up on board with Ejiofor, he'll join a cast that also features Benedict Cumberbatch as the titular Sorcerer Supreme and Tilda Swinton as The Ancient One. **Doctor Strange** is currently set to hit screens on November 4th, 2016.

Moving over to a rumour that just will not go away, there's been further talk over the last month on the topic of bringing Blade into the MCU in some fashion. In fact, Wesley Snipes, who played the Daywalker in three **Blade** movies, has openly talked about how he's had "positive and favourable discussions" with Marvel over the character. In an interesting spin on things, new speculation suggests that we could very well see a new version of Blade – a female take on the character. As part of the rejigged **All-New, All-Different Marvel**, the restarted **Blade** comic book is due to hand Blade a 16-year-old daughter by the name of Fallon Grey. Fallon will become a badass in the same vein as her father, with her supposedly then becoming the focus of this new comic book series moving forward. The release of **Blade #1** was set for October but was then pushed back, with the apparent reason being that Marvel Entertainment stepped in and used their influence, as the book is believed to be the blueprint for any new live-action **Blade**. As well as rumours of appearing in one of Marvel's big screen adventures, there's even been talk that either Snipes or a new Blade could appear in one of Marvel's television shows.

Taking the action over to 20th Century Fox's **X-Men** world, Patrick Stewart has confirmed that his Professor X will play a pivotal part in James Mangold's **Wolverine 3**. In addition to this, star Hugh Jackman has revealed that there's been talks of having Liev Schreiber's Sabretooth and Logan's famed 'berserker rage' be a part of this final outing for Jackman's Wolverine. And yes, the stories of the film being some play on the fan-favourite **Old Man Logan** comic book arc are still rearing their heads. Mangold's follow-up to **The Wolverine** is set for a March 3rd, 2017 release. Sticking with the same shared universe, the Channing Tatum-starring **Gambit** is close to finding its female lead. Last month, we reported that **SPECTRE**'s Léa Seydoux, **Mad Max: Fury Road**'s Abbey Lee and **Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation**'s Rebecca Ferguson were being considered for the role of Bella Donna Boudreaux. Following on from that, it's believed that Seydoux has actually now been offered the part, although she's yet to officially sign on as of going to print. To be directed by **Rise of the Planet of the Apes**' Rupert Wyatt, **Gambit** will be released on October 7th, 2016.

Taking the action to the small screen now, and more specifically to the Netflix-exclusive **Luke Cage**. Set in the same world as the stunning **Daredevil** (which itself has this month added **Safe House**'s Stephen Rider as DA Blake Tower, who will serve as an ally to the Guardian Devil), the Mike Colter-starring **Luke Cage** is starting to gather some momentum. Whereas Cage himself will debut early next year in the Krysten Ritter-led **Jessica Jones**, Power Man's own show has brought in plenty of villains and even a few good guys. As the main villain of the show, **True Blood**'s Alfre Woodard will be playing Minette, who will be the show's take on the comic book rogue Black Mariah. With her fingers in political pies, 'Minette' will also be joined by **Cloverfield**'s Theo Rossi as Shades, another comic book character and one who fires optic blasts to aide in his wrongdoings. And then there's the pimptastic Cornell Cottonmouth, to be played by **The Hunger Games**' Mahershala Ali, who will be serving up ladies of the night and drug deals aplenty. Arriving to assist Cage, though, will be Simone Missick as Missy, who will be the series' take on famed bionic-armed badass and former cop Misty Knight. **Luke Cage** will premiere in the second half of next year.

As **Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** delves further into the realm of the Inhumans, Season Three has cast former American footballer Matthew Willig as Inhuman rogue Lash. In terms of the character, he's basically an energy-controlling being who generally has a disdain for many of his own kind. **Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** returns to US screens on September 29th, with a UK return expected to follow shortly



Someone, somewhere (in the Lionsgate/Millennium Films camp, anyway) must think that **Leatherface – The Teen Years** sounds like a good idea, but honestly, we're not yet sold. This prequel to Tobe Hooper's 1974 **The Texas Chain Saw Massacre** (the poster designer really must pay attention to that name, we're complete pedants when it comes to that) has a synopsis that doesn't sound too bad, if only they'd have steered clear of trying to tie it in with an existing film.

Vanessa Grasse plays Lizzy, a nurse who is kidnapped by a pack of teenagers from the mental hospital where she works. One of her abductees will become the twisted killer we're all familiar with. Stephen Dorff is the sheriff on their trail, and Lili Taylor plays Verna Sawyer, no doubt a relation of the cannibalistic family. On the plus side, the directors are Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, who made the superb **Inside** (2007) and **Livid** (2011). No release date is set as yet, but we can expect **Leatherface** to develop his acne sometime in 2016.

after. As well as the main show, though, the long-mooted **Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** spin-off is again moving forward after having at one point being put on hold. Now officially known as **Marvel's Most Wanted**, the new series will, as previously reported, focus on Adrianne Palicki's Mockingbird and Nick Blood's Lance Hunter. The show has already been put in for a pilot order, with Jeff Bell and Paul Zbyszewski developing and writing the series. The pair will also executive produce alongside Jeph Loeb. Additionally, another Marvel series is in the early stages of development from Oscar winner John Ridley. No details are known on that stage whatsoever, although some cheeky speculation has thrown up the possibility of something related to the aforementioned **Blade** story. AP

STAR TREK

A spectacular celebration of music that boldly goes where no music has gone before will be performed at London's Royal Albert Hall on November 1st. **Star Trek: The Ultimate Voyage** will see Justin Free conduct the London Philharmonic Orchestra as they play a selection of the fantastic scores from the **Trek** movies and TV shows. A 40ft screen will show selected clips to complement the aural experience, which looks like an unmissable experience. Tickets are available from royalalberthall.com.

horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

SEPTEMBER 20TH – OLDBOY (2003)

Forget the Spike Lee remake (oh, you already have?), this is revenge cinema at its finest, as a man imprisoned for fifteen years must find his captors within five days. One thing's for sure, you won't enjoy Tentacle Tuesday as much afterwards.

+++

OCTOBER 1ST – DR JEKYLL AND SISTER HYDE (1971)

Count on Hammer Films to put a fun spin on a classic tale as mild-mannered Henry Jekyll (Ralph Bates) transforms into a malevolent female Hyde (Martine Beswick). Perfect casting of the leads raise it above the sleazy approach.

+++

OCTOBER 5TH - CRAWLSPACE (2013)

Just moved into a new house? This disturbing thriller might not be for you, as a previous owner terrorises a family, plotting to take what he has lost. It's a remake of an '80s Klaus Kinski film, with the nastiness amped all the way up.

+++

OCTOBER 10TH – CANNIBAL APOCALYPSE (1980)

The British TV premiere of an underrated classic of the VHS age. Antonio Margheriti's shocker has Vietnam vets returning to America carrying a virus that turns people into flesh-eating psychos. The fantastic John Saxon and Italian legend Giovanni Lombardo Radice star.

+++

Classic **Doctor Who** continues a phenomenally successful run with stories this month including the very first appearance of William Hartnell in **An Unearthly Child**, and **The Daleks** taking a bow (well, if they were so articulated), while Second Doctor Patrick Troughton appears in **The Mind Robber** and faces the Ice Warriors once more in **The Seeds of Death**. Another old TV favourite returns in the form of David Vincent (Roy Thinnes) in the classic '60s show **The Invaders**.

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.

DC

Getting the DC Cinematic Universe chatter out of the way early on, the only real news on Warner Brothers' DC movies this month largely centres on the Man of Steel himself, Superman. First up, stories have come out that claim **Mad Max** guru George Miller is being lined up to direct **Man of Steel 2**. Interestingly enough, Miller was helming the **Justice League** movie of the 2000s before that was scrapped at the last minute despite having a complete cast in place. Just before going to print though, conflicting reports have come out to say that any idea of a **Man of Steel** sequel is currently on indefinite hold right now. Regardless of whether that film happens or not, we know that we'll be seeing the Big, Blue Boy Scout next year in **Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice**. Joining Henry Cavill's Last Son of Krypton and Ben Affleck's Dark Knight will be Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman, who this month has seen details of her **Dawn of Justice** role apparently revealed. Whilst The Amazon may be playing a supporting role in the film, she will seemingly have a hugely important part to play as new reports say she'll be going toe-to-toe with the vicious Doomsday, going as far as to even lop off one of the hands of the beastly creature that was responsible for slaying the unslayable Kal-El in the classic **Death of Superman** comic book arc. Helmed by Zack Snyder, **Batman V Superman** hits screens on March 25th, 2016.

Now whilst that's it for DCCU news, there's a whole boatload of stuff to get through in relation to the various DC-based TV shows that are heading to screens over the next few months. Starting things with the Stephen Amell-starring **Arrow**, and there's some fantastic news for fans of NBC's recently-cancelled **Constantine**. Remember how the last few months saw the sad news that Matt Ryan's Hellblazer had taken his last breath but there was still the slightest of hopes that the character may appear in Starling City? Well, fear not, for it's now been confirmed

that Ryan's John Constantine will make an appearance in an episode of **Arrow**'s Season Four. Whether Constantine comes to visit his abode or not, Oliver Queen will also have a shiny new Arrowcave for the new season - a new lair that looks just a tad Justice League-lite. Moving from Starling City to Central City, and **The Flash** has similarly brought in some further new faces ahead of its second season. In terms of the villains of the show, Candyman himself, Tony Todd, has been revealed to be voicing the 'big bad' of the new season, Zoom. Todd will not be physically playing Zoom, and the show will keep the villain's real identity as a mystery throughout the majority of Season Two. A slightly more minor villain has also been added, with **Hemlock Grove**'s Demore Barnes set to play Tokamak, an energy-absorbing rogue straight from the comic book world. On the side of the good guys, another speedster has been added in the form of Jesse Quick. Newcomer Violet Beane has been cast as Jesse, who will be portrayed as a college kid who gets caught up in the battle between Grant Gustin's Barry Allen and Zoom. For more details on a whole lot of what to expect from **Arrow**'s fourth season and **The Flash**'s second, be sure to check out our extensive previews in this very issue [See page 54].

Taking flight and soaring over to CBS' **Supergirl**, and some familiar DC names have joined the show's ever-expanding roster in the shape of a villain and a Lane. Where the rogue is concerned, **Salem**'s Iddo Goldberg will be playing villainous android, Red Tornado. On the Lane front, **X-Men: First Class**' Glenn Morshower has been cast as General Sam Lane, the father of Lois and Lucy Lane (who will be played by Jenna Dewan Tatum in the show). Starring Melissa Benoist in the titular role, **Supergirl** debuts in the US on October 26th, with a UK home and debut yet to be announced.

In some final DC news, and the most leftfield of all of these stories this month, NBC and DC Entertainment are getting together to develop a live-action comedy set in the DC Universe. Titled **Powerless**, the show will focus on the regular people that just so happen to live in the DC realm. **A to Z's** Ben Queen will be executive producing the 30-minute episodes, with the show having been described as "a workplace comedy set at one of the worst insurance companies in America." Yep, we're scratching our heads too... AP

AND FINALLY...

If saying farewell to **The Human Centipede** franchise hit you hard, fear not, as director Tom Six will soon be re-releasing one of his early Dutch films to the unsuspecting public. Made in 2008, **I Love Dries** will be retitled **What the F**K?**! The story follows a pair of obsessed fans who kidnap a famous singer, the plan being for him to make the woman pregnant. A DVD/VOD release, subtitled for the first time, is expected later this year.

+++

Men in Black's Barry Sonnenfeld has apparently signed on to direct the Netflix adaptation of **Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events** that was announced last year. Sonnenfeld was originally down to helm the 2004 big-screen version, which starred Jim Carrey. No news on when to actually expect the series as of yet.

+++

Staying with small-screen adaptations, the much-mooted **Galaxy Quest** TV show has found a home on the Amazon Prime streaming service. The show will now be a co-production between Paramount and Amazon Studios. The original 1999 movie, which starred Sigourney Weaver, Tim Allen and Alan Rickman was a superb pastiche of **Star Trek** and its acting crew, and is still a firm favourite for many. Let's hope the series can keep the fun going.

+++

We could also be seeing a series based around **The Brides of Dracula**. Former Marvel Comics writer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa (who wrote the recent version of **The Town that Dreaded Sundown**) and **Arrow/The Flash** producer Greg Berlanti have a pilot in the works for NBC, with the premise being that the three vampire women survive to the modern day, becoming incredibly rich and powerful, sounding like it could be a Gothic version of **Dynasty**. The pair also have **Riverdale**, based on Archie comics, in the works for The CW.

TTC 417 stories by Martin Unsworth, Andrew Pollard. Edited by Martin Unsworth

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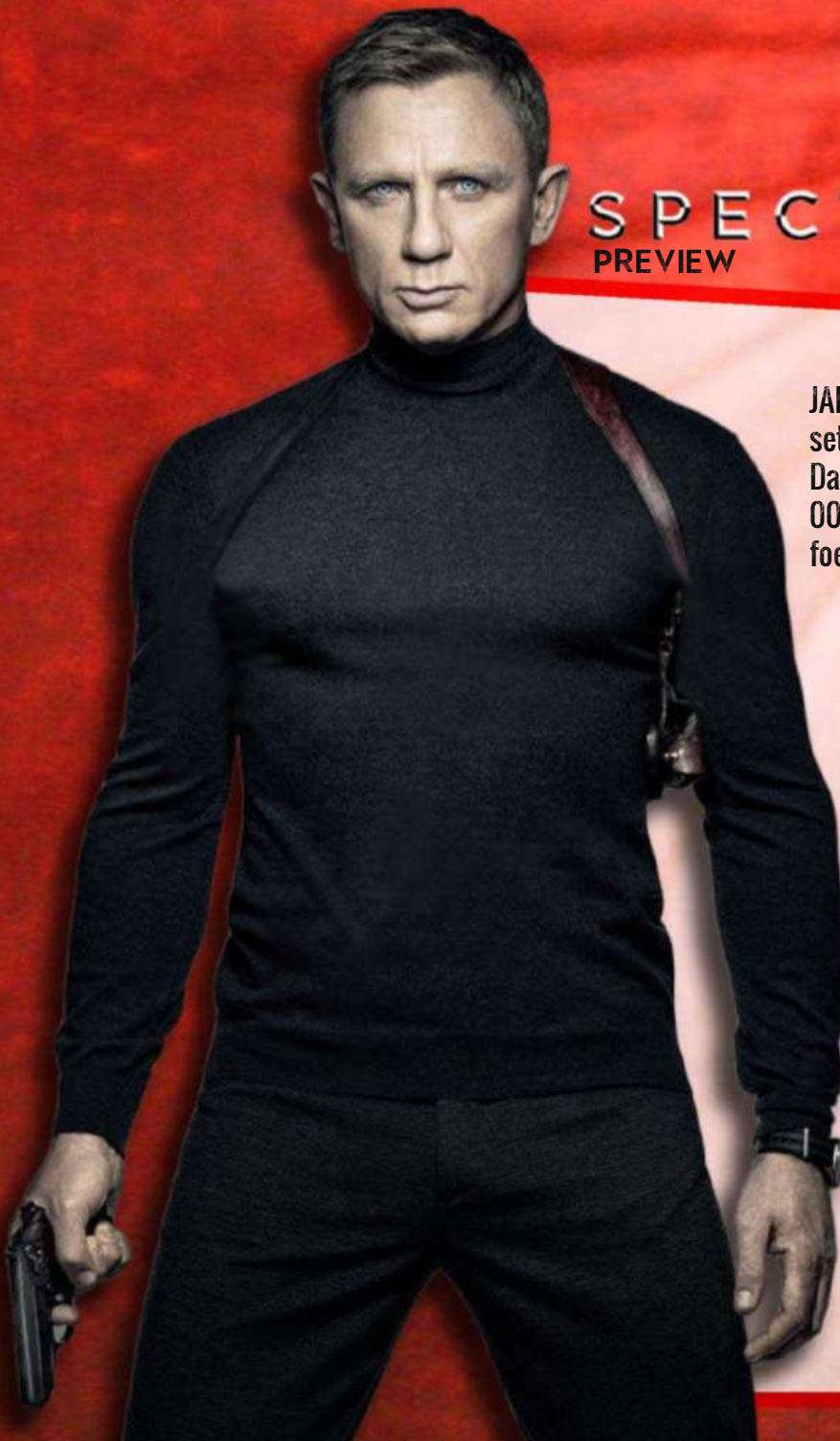
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BY JOHN TOWNSEND

WE'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU MR. BOND...



SPECTRE

PREVIEW

JAMES BOND is back! Now firmly settled into the role, we look at Daniel Craig's fourth outing as 007, and welcome back an old foe in **SPECTRE**...

Since *Casino Royale* was released in 2006 and effectively rebooted the Bond franchise with an edgier, more contemporary styling, many of the more familiar aspects of this most British spy series have been slowly re-introduced. We've had an origin story for tipple of choice the martini, although whether taken shaken or stirred is still a moot point. We've been shown how Bond gained his licence to kill and been introduced to a younger, more tech-savvy and sarcastic head of Q Branch. At the end of previous film *Skyfall* the picture was almost complete... almost. As a new M settled in to his nostalgic oak panelled office and Moneypenny took up residence at a desk next to a familiar looking coat rack, Bond was handed an assignment for his eyes only. Only one thing was still missing.

When *Casino Royale* introduced an unnamed criminal organisation, later to be identified as Quantum, the world was given a new group of super criminals for MI6 and the CIA to battle, with Bond very much to the fore. As the much maligned, and beset with problems, *Quantum Of Solace* failed to carry the idea of this new organisation forward, the idea was dropped altogether for 2012's *Skyfall*, bringing the threat much, much closer to home. Now that is all about to change with the 24th Bond film **SPECTRE**.



A Quantum Of SPECTRE

SPECTRE (Special Executive for Counter-intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge and Extortion) is James Bond's oldest foe. First appearing in debut film *Dr. No* in 1962, with the reclusive antagonist a high ranking member of the shadowy organisation, SPECTRE were effectively dismantled after 1971's *Diamonds Are Forever*. Their cat-fancying leader Blofeld was never seen again, although there is an uncredited cameo at the beginning of *For Your Eyes Only* as Bond drops a "wheelchair villain" down a convenient chimney. The disappearance of SPECTRE, though, is as much to do with courtroom squabbles as the efforts of Bond himself.

In 1961, Bond creator Ian Fleming was sued by his former collaborators Kevin McClory and Jack Whittingham over who had the film rights to the former's novel *Thunderball*, and therefore the characters within that including Blofeld and SPECTRE. Suffering from ill health, Fleming eventually settled out of court in 1963, with the film rights being awarded to McClory while the literary rights remained with Fleming, allowing the inclusion of SPECTRE in several novels since including those written by John Gardner. That year, EON Productions producers Albert R. Broccoli and Harry Saltzman made an agreement with McClory to make a film based on *Thunderball* that also forbade the latter from making any adaptations himself for ten years. Even though SPECTRE and Blofeld appeared in *You Only Live Twice* and *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, and then finally in *Diamonds Are Forever*, these copyright issues prevented any further film appearances and the organisation faded away. For McClory's part,

he did try to revive the *Thunderball* story with 1983's *Never Say Never Again*, even recruiting an ageing Sean Connery who had his own axe to grind, but SPECTRE were essentially now retired.

In 2013, this changed, with the long-running dispute finally being resolved. MGM settled with the McClory Estate and now have full ownership of the copyright and as a result the SPECTRE and Blofeld names could once again be used in an official Bond film. Handled correctly, this development is the Bond franchise's joker, EON's ace-in-the-hole if you will. No other film series, with the exception of some sci-fi, contains a name or organisation so synonymous with the desire for world domination, a name so ingrained in people's psyche as SPECTRE. And no other film series can boast a supervillain so (dis) likeable as aquarium aficionado Blofeld. The only question remains then; will Blofeld appear in *SPECTRE*?

With Christoph Waltz cast as the film's "big bad", but interestingly named Oberhauser in the credits, it looks like we'll have to wait until the film opens to find out. Current Bond producers Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson have been adamant that Blofeld will definitely not feature and if that proves to be the case, could they be saving Bond's nemesis for the next film? As that is the 25th film in the series and potentially Daniel Craig's final appearance in the famous tuxedo, it could be perfect timing.

So what's it all about then?

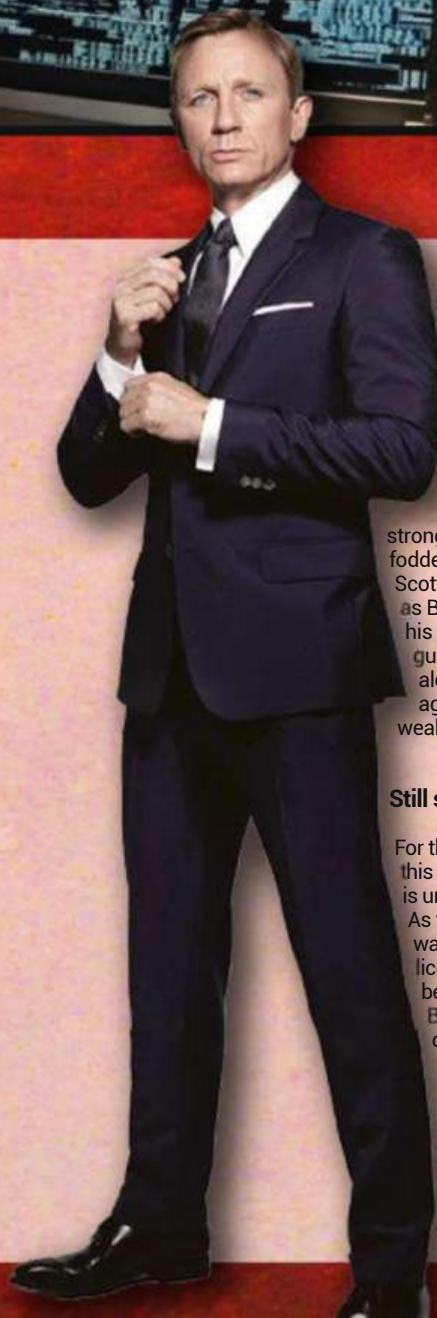
With Ralph Fiennes barely seated behind the

big desk, a curious message sets in motion a series of events that will lead Bond directly into conflict with SPECTRE. With *MI6* under threat from mounting political pressures in the wake of Silva's attack, it seems Bond must once again compromise his principles in order to unravel a mystery that connects to an enemy from his own past.

And once again, it would appear that Bond ignores his orders.

In *Casino Royale*, Bond quit *MI6* for the love of a good woman, who actually turned out not to be such a good woman in the end. In *Quantum Of Solace*, Bond has his passports and credit cards revoked by Judi Dench's M when he sets off to avenge Vesper and take on Quantum personally. In *Skyfall*, following his shooting at the hands of Moneypenny Bond disappears presumed dead. Now, in *SPECTRE*, there is the strong suggestion that Bond once again goes rogue. Is it really too much to ask for him to just follow his orders? While it's interesting to see the headstrong spy go it alone, an audience's fatigue may begin to show if the script isn't right. Given that the final act came under scrutiny following the Sony hack debacle in 2014, questions still remain as to whether those fears were ever allayed.

There is no doubt that the pressure is on for *SPECTRE*. With returning director Sam Mendes back behind the camera and the shadow cast by *Skyfall* being the first Bond film to pass the billion dollar mark demonstrating an increased demand that needs to be met, the filmmakers are pulling out all the stops. As well as



the shiny new Aston Martin and the intrigue generated by the title itself, there are some notable inclusions to the cast that make the film's intent to capitalise on this demand clear. Fresh from a film-stealing performance as Drax in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, Dave Bautista seems set to be a very traditional Bond henchman as Mr. Hinx, perhaps one in the mould of the legendary Jaws himself. Léa Seydoux and Monica Bellucci will hopefully continue the franchise's recent trend towards stronger female characters rather than the token bed fodder that frequented the spy's earlier outings. Andrew Scott is perhaps the most interesting piece of casting as British government minister Max Denbigh with his character and motives still remaining a closely guarded mystery. With the main cast all returning along with new regular Jesper Christiansen once again reprising Mr. White, there are few, if any weaknesses. So what of James Bond himself?

Still so serious then?

For the many people out there who have issues with this version of a gritty, too stoic James Bond, *SPECTRE* is unlikely to provide any respite from those concerns. As the character was rebooted in *Casino Royale*, so was the fundamental personality of the agent with the licence to kill. Along with the preposterousness that became so prevalent in the final throws of the Pierce Brosnan era, many of the one-liners and the sense of fun were also consigned to the MI6 archives. Craig's Bond is more likely to shoot first in a situation rather than raise an intrigued eyebrow but this newly grounded character does give a more realistic insight into a man trained to kill in the name of his country. Serious? Definitely. Less fun? Undoubtedly. More realistic? Certainly, and therein lies the key. In a world where everyone walks down

the street with what 20 years ago would have doubled as a Bond gadget, audiences are less impressed by technology. They are also less tolerant of the misogynistic witticisms that peppered many of Craig's predecessors' films with misguided regularity. Bond's job is to kill; does he need to smile while doing it? Let the competition have their fun instead.

It's time to stand up and be counted...

We've had the 50th anniversary and we've paid our respects. We revelled at the historic, nostalgic references that populated *Skyfall*. Time to move on. No more games, Mr. Bond.

Since Ian Fleming's Eton-educated pin-up for the secret services strode suavely on to our screens in 1962, numerous pretenders to his spy crown have come and gone, both on film and on television. Never, though, have the stakes been so high. With demand for the Roger Moore-esque antics of *Kingsman* and the more madcap buffoonery of *Spy* still fresh in people's minds, and with *Bourne* about to get another Greengrass/Damon outing, there has never been more pressure on the world's most famous International Export to deliver the goods.

Mendes' Bond needs to deliver. Craig's Bond needs to deliver. This Bond needs to deliver. *This* Bond film needs to be the Bond film.

SPECTRE opens in UK cinemas on October 26th, before hitting worldwide audiences a week later.

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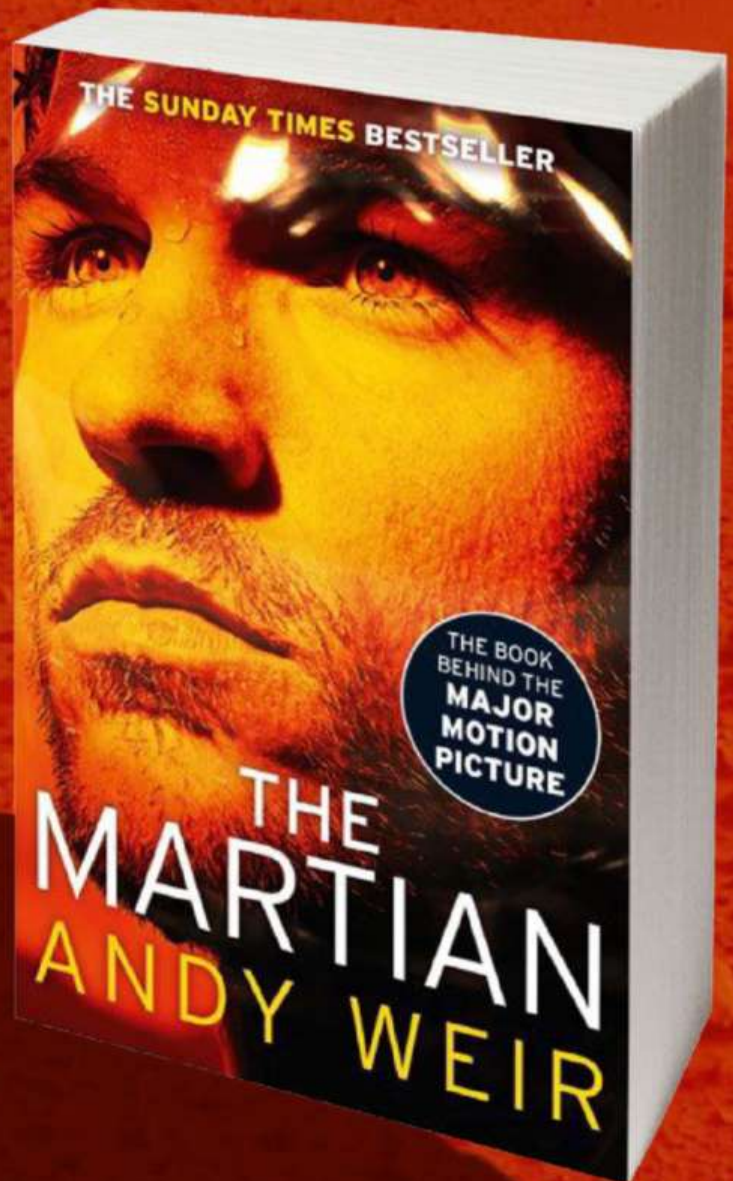
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BUY ANOTHER DAY

By Jack Bottomley

AS SPECTRE LOOMS, STARBURST LOOKS BACK THROUGH THE DECADES AT THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL MERCHANDISE INSPIRED BY JAMES BOND...

Who would've thought that when Ian Fleming penned *Casino Royale* back in 1953, James Bond would become the force that he is today. Bond's lingering legacy in both literature and film has gone on to become a British institution and one of our furthest reaching creations, alongside Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. So, as the world prepares for Bond's 24th cinematic outing (discounting David Niven driven spoof *Casino Royale* and unlicensed Connery caper *Never Say Never Again*), we decided to take a look at the martini swilling, gun toting, female seducing secret agent's impact in the world of merchandise. Now it would have been pretty easy to just fill this list with swish cars, but where is the fun in that? So prepare yourselves for a variety of Bond gear that stretches the spectrum of taste. Some cool, some lame and some as unusual as Scaramanga's third nip...

Cue opening credits sequence and Shirley Bassey.

JAMES BOND ACTION FIGURE (1965, GILBERT)

Gilbert's figure was part of the Bond merch boom at this point. By today's advancing standards, this figure based on Sean Connery's Bond in *Thunderball* is quite rudimentary. Yet today,



the figure is quite the collectable item, with many eBay sales of the mini-Connery stretching into the multiple hundred dollars mark. 12 inches (in height that is... no dirty jokes please... not yet, anyway) and kitted out in casual gear, with accompanying scuba tanks and other useful bits and bobs, this well-crafted figure boasts not a bad likeness of the man many still call the greatest Bond there ever was. "Oh yesh indeed, Mish Moneypenny."

TOILET SEATS (2010, SIT ON YOUR FACE)

Far from bog standard (oh, there is more where that came from), these hand-painted toilet seats - by Tom Milton of the crudely-named website Sit on Your Face - are made to the demands of the customer. Troubling as it is to have Bond staring up at you from the throne, these are undeniably well drawn. Sean Connery headlines the selection on the site but also available in the Bond range are Roger Moore and Daniel Craig. Something tells us Brosnan, Dalton and Lazenby might be OK giving this merchandising opportunity a miss.



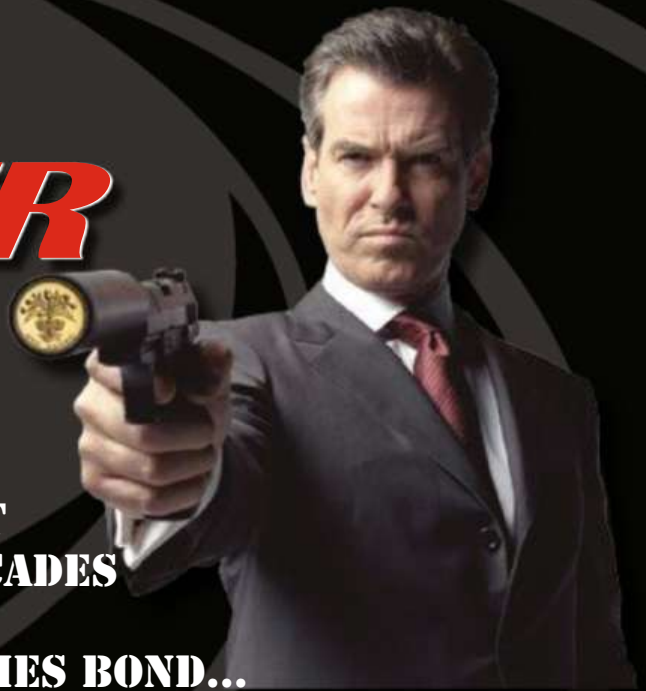
BABY BIBS (2009, BIBBLE DRIBBLE)

STARBURST shares many things with James Bond; we enjoy a good drink and have often found ourselves threatened by megalomaniacs. Although the strongest link is our love of puns, a mastery shared by Bibble Dribble's corny-but-adorable novelty Bond Baby Bibs; one is called 'License to Spill' and the other 'Quantum of Solids'. Both get thumbs up from us, though might we suggest for us grown-ups: Live and Let Dine, A View to a Grill and Fry Another Day.



BOOTLEG LUNCH BOX (UNKNOWN)

Bond seems slightly more blessed than the likes of Marvel and DC when it comes to being ripped off, although this vintage lunchbox has a go. The painting-like image of a suspiciously happy secret agent with a sophisticated lady (that explains the smile) is quite neat, but is thoroughly cheapened by that 'Bond



XX Secret Agent' tagline. God knows who Agent XX is? Perhaps Bond's slightly more explicit cousin? Well 006 did not work out too well for Bond in *Goldeneye*, so maybe a replacement is in order, though Bond XX sounds like something out of a softcore porno.

SCENTED CANDLES (2011, TOCCA)

As movie tie-in products go, there are always some strange ones and these scented

candles from Tocca are not the first choice for a romantic evening. For one, Bond is a little bit of a misogynist and not exactly the best inspiration for a solid relationship. Also, the flowery packaging doesn't exactly scream 007, especially when Tocca state that the fragrance is the manly and seductive scent of 'the interior of an Aston Martin and a dry Martini'. Each to their own, we suppose, but don't expect Pussy Galore to come knocking at your door by lighting this up.



BOND 007 QUICK FLAME RAY BEAM AND RAY DARTS (1965, BELL)

There have been golden guns, lasers, and darts used throughout the Bond franchise. In fact, over the years the shelves have been crammed with 007-ised toy weapons like Lone Star's 1964 Cap Pistol (with silencer) and Imperial's 1984 9mm Submachine Gun. However, this toy from Bell is as baffling as May Day's haircut. The Ray Beam gun toy not only has nothing to do with early Bond films but (aside from the 'Bond 007' heading) the box art has virtually nothing to do with M16's super agent at all! The box shows a - we presume - agent, who looks more like a traffic warden shooting the wheel off a relatively harmless looking assailant's car. A very strange vintage item that seems more like a space toy than anything, yet has been included in select James Bond auctions. Somebody get Q onto this pronto, for more intel.



UNWASHED TRUNKS (2006, EON PRODUCTIONS)

Because a pair of shorts from *Casino Royale* is not enough, we have to go all in (pun intended) and have a pair of unwashed shorts.

Smirk all you want, at the 50th anniversary Bond auction, these undergarments brought in a whopping \$71,200. Not bad for dirty pants, however we recommend you don't sell your unwashed boxers online and expect the same results.



CHARACTER TIE (1990, KFC)



"Be Bond for a day"... and get bullied for weeks with this garish James Bond tie from KFC (yes, that KFC) which was a strange way to promote the home video release of *License To Kill*, especially when you consider that Timothy Dalton's Bond was far less family-friendly in approach. Plus the comic book-like imagery across the tie is not exactly in keeping with the character; heck, the image of Bond on the box art isn't even wearing a tie at all! Bond has inspired a vast array of vehicles, clothing, alcohol ranges and the like, but that is not strongly reflected in a tie that comes free with cooked chicken. We'll wager you will not be seeing Daniel Craig don one of these in *Spectre*. That said, Bond did once dress as a clown, so who knows?

JAMES BOND POPSICLE (2009, DEL MONTE SUPERFRUIT SMOOTHIES)

The Licking Daylights, anyone? Being a super agent is sexy, so naturally legions of British people voted in Del Monte's 2009 poll



and Daniel Craig topped the list of coolest celebrities. This victory inspired one of the strangest Bond tie-ins in the form of Del Monte Superfruit Smoothies Bond lolly, modelled on Daniel Craig's famous topless rising from the sea sequence in *Casino Royale* (the same scene which featured the aforementioned mucky shorts). Now we know it is a dream come true that many people got to lick the chest of James Bond but no matter how you cut it, or rather freeze it, this 100 calorie treat is truly bizarre. Although with a choice of blueberry, pomegranate, and cranberry flavors, bizarre never tasted so good.

RENAULT 11 TAXI (1985, MATCHBOX)

When you think about the years of Bond films, there are so many wonderful vehicles that come to mind

and the best of all has to be the Renault 11 Taxi. What's that? There is no need for that language! Surely you remember yearning for it in your Christmas stocking? No? Well, Matchbox clearly saw a market here with this toy car that is, well, a taxi... and that is about as exciting as it sounds. True, the sequence where Bond drives half the car in *A View to a Kill* does conjure some good memories, but people are unanimous that the Renault 11 was not exactly up there with the agent's greatest vehicles.



SECRET SERVICE SUNGLASSES (1984, IMPERIAL TOY CORPORATION)

As toys go, silly sunglasses have been around since people realised that you could actually protect your eyes from the sun whilst looking like an utter tool. These are cheap sunglasses, complete with a silly box that has Roger Moore's Bond looking foolish with these glasses placed over his picture. As Elliot Carver might say, "hah, pathetic".



ZUKOVSKY CAVIAR (2001, BOND LIFESTYLE)

As you might expect from Bond Lifestyle, the website is full of high-class items allowing you to live like 007. One of the most offbeat sections of the site is where they discuss Bond's onscreen history with beluga caviar - mentioning its appearance in *Thunderball*, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, *A View to a Kill*, *Casino Royale* and *The World is Not Enough*. That last one being particularly relevant because, as well as giving you an analysis on the pricey fish eggs, the site allows you to print out this replica label from *The World is Not Enough*. As you may remember, Robbie Coltrane's Russian Mafia boss/businessman Valentin Zukovsky has an impactful part in the film - particularly in the caviar factory sequence. This label pays tribute to that and allows you to garnish your garnish (dangerously close to dropping that *You've Got Mail* line there!) in style.



JAMES BOND 007 SHOOTING ATTACHÉ CASE (1965, MULTIPLE TOYS)



A James Bond spy set is probably the most predictable piece of merchandise to emerge from the world of 007. The likes of Colbie and Lone Star released their versions of the 007 spy sets, each with plus points (Lone Star had a very impressive pistol toy) and negatives (Lone Star's small stripper-like gun holster and Colbei's bondage-looking shoulder holster). However, the magnum opus of the Bond spy set to this day, proving that diamonds truly are forever, has to be the mouth-watering Shooting Attaché Case from Multiple Toys. The set was immaculate and the stuff of an aspiring super agent's dreams. The jam-packed set included bullets, a passport, cash, a pistol and a silencer; you name it, this baby has got it. The case even has a secret button that ejects a hidden blade weapon! This is a rare toy valued at up to \$2000 in mint condition. From Multiple Toys with Love.

SPIN SAW (1983, WEMBLEY)

As weapons go, a handheld yo-yo-like spinning saw is quite effective and this toy by Wembley is a good re-creation of the dangerous weapon used by Kamal Khan's (Louis Jourdan) assassins in *Octopussy*. Boasting a super spinning action and faithful construction, the flimsy box often had an annoyingly detrimental effect on the condition of the toy itself. So you might say this cutting edge idea had a see-saw effect delivery (that's the saw puns all used up).



RUBBER BANDS (1965, TIN TIN BAZAR INC)



The name's Band, James Band (sorry). These early rubber bands are a pretty neat example of everyday items being jazzed up by movie licensing. The box reeks of vintage cool and the multi-coloured bands are rather unique too. There are not too many details on their production but one wonders if these were intended for a rubber band gun (remember those, anyone?).

JAMES BOND JR. FIGURE (1991, HASBRO)

Well, what do you expect when you put it about that much? There's probably a legion of baby Bonds walking around out there. Seriously though, despite sounding like the cockamamie idea of a bootleg toy, *James Bond Jr.* was actually a thing,



starting off in 1967 as an unsuccessful spin-off novel called *The Adventures of James Bond Junior 003½*. However, the small Hasbro toy line was based on the cheesy but successful 1991 animated series *James Bond Jr.* Others in the line included Scuba Gear Bond Jr., Ninja Gear Bond Jr. and villains like the hat-flinging Oddjob and Jaws.

JAMES BOND I.D. TAGS (1984, IMPERIAL TOYS)

Roger Moore once said about Bond, "This man is supposed to be a spy and yet, everybody knows he's a spy. Every bartender in the world offers him martinis that are shaken, not stirred.



What kind of serious spy is recognised everywhere he goes?" He has a point, but at least he didn't have all his details on display on a personal I.D. Tag. Well that wasn't stopping Imperial Toys from releasing this set of tags that were a little bit baffling as merchandise goes. The box can only really boast about the 24-inch chain that comes with them and features a picture of a younger Moore flashing his watch and looking very pleased with himself... "not sure why, but he's not showing off". This really felt more like a military toy rebranded to make some extra dosh.

GOLD ASTON MARTIN (1965, CORGI)

Corgi Toys have reliably given children the tools to re-enact some of Bond's most improbable car chase set pieces and many favour the collectable No. 261 James Bond 007 Aston Martin DB5 Goldfinger Original. It sounds impressive because it pretty much is, a beautifully made and presented little gold model (ejector seat included - high five!). There is a reason this car is so beloved, "Do you expect me to gawk?" "No Mr. Bond I expect you to buy!"



SOLID STATE WRIST WALKIE-TALKIES (1977, VANITY FAIR)

We have had walkie-talkie toys hit shelves for all manner of brands over the years, but on this occasion it kind of fits. Plus Vanity Fair actually did a great job of making a very appealing set of wrist-mounted walkie-talkies, which looked straight out of a Moore-era Bond caper. Indeed, they were big and somewhat clunky but this toy was a pretty cool spin on the standard walkie-talkie toys. Imperial Toys also released a far cheaper looking Walkie-Talkie James Bond set in the '80s... it did not measure up.



BULLET HOLES (1987, CMP INTERNATIONAL)

If mum and dad were not OK with you trying to shoot holes in the family car windscreen (and if they were, well done for being alive today) then here was the answer. Yes, the gift that everyone would be thrilled to receive - magnetised bullet holes to stick to your car windows! Not impressed? Well, these fully licensed sets from CMP International also included a 007 back flash and a magnetic licence holder! That ought to come in handy for your *licence to kill*... should you have it to hand, and if you do search for Piers Morgan's co-ordinates immediately.



HARPOON GUN (1965, LONE STAR)



The underwater antics of *Thunderball* certainly have a lot to answer for, as the film inspired all manner of watery merchandise brandishing the Bond ident, from Voit's Snorkel and Swimming Fins (both released in 1965) to Tri-ang's very collectable (worth £140-180) 007 Underwater Battle Board Game. However, one

of the most fondly remembered is the projectile firing Harpoon Gun toy (quite rare today) from Lone Star. The company made all manner of menacing Bond firearms in their time, many of which would be confiscated by the M's and Q's of the household nowadays, but this was one of the most unique and admired. Collectors have been known to shell out up to £500 for a harpoon gun in good condition! "I think you get the point."

EXPLODING SPOON (1985, COIBEL)

Gadgets in the Bond films have died down in recent years, but over 007's many adventures he has had chance to use everything from invisible cars to glass-shattering rings. However, and do please write in if we are mistaken, we do not recall Bond whipping out an exploding spoon? This Spanish toy's box reads 'As seen in the movies' but you'll probably just be going all Alan Partridge... "Stop getting Bond wrong!"



JAMES BOND LOTUS ESPRIT AMPHIBIOUS CAR (1977, AHI)

Now we are all well aware of just how beautiful some of the Bond model car and racing track toys have been but one quite rare and fun one came from AHI in 1977. A real find nowadays, this toy Lotus Esprit (from *The Spy Who Loved Me*) was not one of the most beautiful models of its kind but was something that would appeal to any kid. Much like the brilliant onscreen car on which it is based, AHI's toy moves on land and underwater and was a toy that lived up to its billing. 'Nobody Does it Better' indeed...



SPECTRE RING PROP REPLICA (2014, FACTORY ENTERTAINMENT)

As Sam Mendes' next (and for him, last) Bond caper draws closer, the insidious secret organisation S.P.E.C.T.R.E., led by the pussy-stroking occasional slaphead Blofeld, is set to rise again. So allow us to get a little evil for a moment with this replica, based on *From Russia with Love* (well, technically it is from California), this beautifully created replica ring will certainly give you a gold finger! The site says the ring is 'plated in 18kt gold and features a genuine black onyx semi-precious stone'... the same company has also released props like the *Goldeneye* weapon (from *Goldeneye*, natch!), the tracking device (from *Goldfinger*) and a metallic set of gnashers as seen on Richard Kiel's monstrous henchman Jaws. "How does that grab you?"



VIAGRA (2005, RED GOLDEN DRAGON)

Sometimes with these merchandise features, the perfect product comes along. A product where the jokes write themselves and the item immediately earns its place on these esteemed pages. This branded, Chinese-made, herbal, 007 James Bond Viagra (yes, it is real) is that product. The box warns that you should not expect immediate results (don't rub it in, guys!); this product, simply put, allows you to, well, *roger more!* It comes in a steel box (crikey, how powerful is it!?) and proudly displays Daniel Craig (à la *Casino Royale*) holding his powerful weapon (oh, behave!). Bond has rarely had performance problems but that being said, we're sure he would be standing proud (well, probably not) that his lasting legacy would be helping to keep the British end up!

RUMBLE PAK,

By Rod McCance

SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED

As *SPECTRE* heads to the screens, *STARBURST* dusts off the consoles and remembers some of the great - and not-so-great - Bond video games...

While you may not think it, James Bond's adventures in video games mirror the big screen outings of Ian Fleming's MI6 Agent, attaining incredible comeback success in the late '90s and surviving a rocky period in the 2000s. Then came one hell of an unexpected comeback in the mid to late 2000s. Bond has had games on every major console over the past three decades. However, the rocky relationship between gamers and MI6's most iconic agent hasn't always led to the best results. You can be sure that James Bond will return to a next generation console sooner rather than later.



As we look back over the spy's curious history in video games, we could start at the beginning; but instead, let's start with the best. *GoldenEye 007* remains most fans' and critics' essential James Bond game. From the intense single player with layers of difficulty adding a huge amount of replay value, to taking the N64 multiplayer and creating a unique experience that could not be matched, *GoldenEye* was the perfect Bond game. Pushing the N64 to new heights, selling over 8 million copies worldwide, *GoldenEye*'s reputation helped Nintendo garner a different audience for its console. Almost everything about *GoldenEye 007* has become iconic. The immersive death matches, gatherings with friends with cheat codes about paintball, golden guns and giant heads. It was all about the experience. It not only represented what Bond was about, it encapsulated the N64 experience. The single-player campaign followed the film closely (which was something rarely seen before with film tie-ins) and also assumed you had seen the film, and that was rare for the time. *GoldenEye* would (and still does) define everything a James Bond game should be. It was the same as the man himself. Sophisticated, full of resources and gadgets, and not afraid to get violent.

GoldenEye understood what it meant to inhabit the character of James Bond and captured the feeling of what it would be like to play as him. This is something so often missed by other developers. They copy mechanics from other games and place James Bond in that situation, while Rare created something that worked because it was a James Bond game, not just a game with James Bond in it. James Bond was the innovator, not the imitator and that is why so many games have failed to capture Bond in all his glory.

That isn't to say that those wanting to enjoy a Bond game should only stick with *GoldenEye*. Despite many flawed games, several instalments still have enough to engross any Bond fan.

Tomorrow Never Dies came two years later than the film in 1999. It was an enormous commercial success on Sony's PlayStation, much like Rare's *GoldenEye 007* on rival N64. Despite the popularity, there was a critical backlash, with many reviewers lambasting the switch from first-person to third-person and the gaping lack of multiplayer. *Tomorrow Never Dies* followed *GoldenEye*'s example by being able to play through the film's story. It featured a unique third person experience, but, it wasn't *GoldenEye 007*. A double-edged sword for the developer. If they had followed with a FPS it couldn't possibly compare to *GoldenEye*, so it is easy to understand the switch in perspective. EA and Black Ops Entertainment couldn't possibly replicate *GoldenEye 007* in many people's eyes and the lack of multiplayer did not get a positive reaction. Whereas *GoldenEye 007* was the quintessential Bond adventure, *Tomorrow Never Dies* was a flawed, albeit fun experience.

Bond returned to the N64 with *The World Is Not Enough* in 2000, again, developed by Black Ops and published by EA. *TWINE* returned to the first-person shooter formula, delivering what many people wanted from *TND*. It worked so well for *GoldenEye* three years earlier, right? *TWINE* was largely a very similar experience to *GoldenEye* and in many reviews was harshly cast aside as a wannabe. However, it is one of the best Bond titles around despite not being widely remembered or mentioned when we discuss Bond in games. Perhaps it is

forgotten because of Rare's follow-up to *GoldenEye*, *Perfect Dark*, which eclipsed it in sales (selling over 2 million copies) and popularity, meaning that sometimes not even the Bond name equals success.

In the middle 2000s, 007 graced many consoles, from the PS2 to GameCube to handheld consoles such as the Nintendo DS. Developers threw many different ideas at the wall, trying to replicate the success of *GoldenEye*. Pierce Brosnan continued to be the face of Bond in many of the games. He was featured on the highly successful *007: Agent Under Fire* and its sequel *Nightfire*. *Agent Under Fire* began life as the PlayStation 2 version of *The World Is Not Enough*, before it eventually ended up becoming its own story. Both games used the *GoldenEye 007* template, but toyed enough with the formula to



make themselves unique. Both featured rather fun driving sections, introducing audiences to a different part of the 007 experience. The critical and commercial success of both these games proved that the template for James Bond games was becoming FPS, but that would soon change. Both *Nightfire* and *Agent Under Fire*, however, are guilty of some of the worst box art in the series.

Before this, EA gave us *007 Racing*, which is largely forgotten about. It was terrible. *007 Racing* mostly failed to give you the feeling of being James Bond. It didn't put you in James Bond's shoes, it put you in his car. While in theory the idea sounds great, it failed, spectacularly. It was a frustrating experience being stuck in a car as James Bond. *007 Racing* mostly involved driving around shooting missiles at things and running over enemies. The title is also misleading, giving the impression that it is a competitive racing game like *Mario Kart*, but it is more like *Spy Hunter*. *007 Racing* certainly wasn't one of the highlights of EA's time with the licence.

EA's stand-out bond title is undoubtedly *Everything or Nothing*. Featuring an incredible cast of Willem Dafoe, Judi Dench, John Cleese, and Jaws himself Richard Kiel, *EoN* is the quintessential third-person 007 game. After a myriad of

FPS's, including the dire *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent*, *EoN* changed the perspective and delivered. Though the driving was sometimes clunky, *EoN* was always fun - something some Bond games forget to be. The high production values gave an authentic feel to the game, though despite *EoN*'s quality it is incredibly brief compared to other Bond games.



In 2006, EA lost the James Bond rights to Activision, but their final Bond game, *From Russia with Love*, was perhaps their bravest and best game. The face of Brosnan was gone, replaced by, you guessed it, Sean Connery. *From Russia with Love* resurrected the 1963 film and added in extra missions, challenges and featured the voice of Connery himself. *FRWL* is a tremendous game, playing with the formula. It offered more realistic combat, though that could be seen as a detriment, plus Connery delivering quips along with brutal third person gameplay. *FRWL* really felt immersive

and challenging. Connery's appearance marked the end for Brosnan's run on the games and was a breath of fresh air.

Activision tried to modernise Bond by putting him in the *Call of Duty* engine, but as enjoyable as *Quantum of Solace* is, it never captures the spirit of Bond. The game feels soulless, like Bond has been taken out of his world and put in to another. It is notable as it is the first appearance of Daniel Craig in a James Bond game and the first Bond on a seventh generation console. *Quantum of Solace* does have some spectacular moments and is way more fun than the actual movie. It also featured, a COD-inspired multiplayer that is huge fun to play. The complete lack of originality and invention is the only real problem, though it is a huge sticking point.



Another one for the lack of originality pile is *007: Blood Stone*. While it is a fun game, one thing that Bond games fail at is creating something unique. *Blood Stone* took a *Grand Theft Auto*/*Gears of War* approach to third-person shooting. That's not to say *Blood Stone* isn't a ton of fun, because it is, but it is so lacking in anything original it's hard to really feel passionate about it. That is the worst thing about half the games on the list; they don't realise how to implement the character of James Bond and his experience of playing as him.

The last Bond game *007 Legends*, released in 2012, gave us a single-player campaign split into six Bond eras (Daniel Craig's *Skyfall* was released as DLC). A neat idea in theory, but the implementation was sorely lacking. It was a poor game with many bad ideas. Though still, inspired by *GoldenEye* (the extra levels, in fact), *007 Legends* at least tried to shake up the formula of what a James Bond game could be. It is just unfortunate they tried to shoehorn it in to a typical *Call of Duty* clone. That is not what James Bond is about.

James Bond's current legacy in video games is a misunderstood one for the moment. In many fans' eyes, *GoldenEye* is held on a lofty pedestal, with nothing else touching Rare's masterpiece. Further inspection uncovers a few hidden gems, like *From Russia with Love* or *Blood Stone*, both just as fun as watching a Bond movie on a rainy Saturday afternoon. That is where some Bond video games fail, trying to copy mechanics from other games. *007 Legends* and *Quantum of Solace* are both especially guilty of this, trying to force James Bond into *Call of Duty*.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH PAUL MOUNT



River would ever return to the show, but here she is, back with the Doctor for the Christmas special," she said. "Steven Moffat is on glittering form, giving us an episode filled with humour and surprise guest castings. I met Peter for the first time at the read through, we had a laugh and I am now excited and ready to start filming with him and the **Doctor Who** team. Christmas in September? Why not?" Moffat himself chipped in with: "Another Christmas, another special for **Doctor Who** – and what could be more special than the return of Alex Kingston as professor River Song? [Who's going to tell him? – **Outside the Box**] The last time the Doctor saw her she was a ghost. The first time he met her she died. So how can he be seeing her again? As ever, with the most complicated relationship in the Universe, it's a matter of time..." Expect more timey-wimey shenanigans when the episode, directed by show veteran Douglas Mackinnon, screens on BBC One in the UK on December 25th.

New York Symphonic Spectacular Shows Sunk!

Next month's two **Doctor Who** Symphonic Spectacular music 'n' monsters shows at the Barclays Centre in New York have been cancelled. Ticketholders were informed: "[Promoter] Vision Nine regrets to announce that the two **Doctor Who** Symphonic Spectacular shows scheduled for October 7th at Barclays Center have been cancelled. All Ticketmaster online and phone orders will automatically be refunded. Remaining refunds will be available at point of purchase."

The concerts, which were to have been hosted by Michelle (Missy/The Master) Gomez, are not presently expected to be rescheduled and no further explanation has been given for the cancellation.



Now On TV – DOCTOR WHO Series Nine Begins!

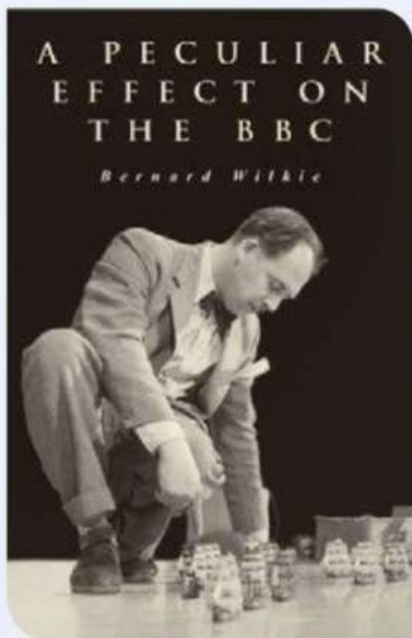
In production since January, the ninth series of **Doctor Who** – the second starring Twelfth Doctor Peter Capaldi – has finally begun transmission on BBC One in the UK and on networks all around the world. At the time of writing, the titles of several episodes of the twelve-week series have yet to be revealed, but the new series commenced on Saturday, September 19th with *The Magician's Apprentice*, written by current showrunner Steven Moffat. Many of the stories this series are two-part adventures (or else with a second episode which is connected to the events and characters from the first) and Moffat's series début is followed by its second instalment, *The Witch's Familiar* on September 26th. The next two episodes are written by Toby (**Being Human**, **The Game**) Whithouse and are directed by Daniel O'Hara with a guest cast list which includes Paul Kaye, Morven Christie and Colin McFarlane. October 16th will see the transmission of *The Girl Who Died* by Jamie Mathieson and Steven Moffat, with its linked second episode *The Woman Who Lived* by former **Torchwood** scriptwriter Catherine Tregenna airing on October 23rd. Guest cast includes Maisie (**Game of Thrones**) Williams, Rufus Hound and David Schofield. More news on subsequent new series episodes in next month's **Outside the Box**.

A Song for Christmas

The now-traditional **Doctor Who** Festive special episode is currently filming at the BBC's Roath Lock studio complex in Cardiff and the BBC have confirmed that Moffat-era favourite Professor River Song, played by Alex Kingston since her first appearance way back in 2008's *Silence in the Library*, will be returning in the show's eleventh consecutive Christmas special. The BBC's official announcement stated: "It's Christmas Day in the future and the TARDIS is parked on a snowy village street, covered in icicles, awaiting its next adventure. Time traveller River Song meets her husband's new incarnation, in the form of Peter Capaldi, for the first time this Christmas." No further information regarding the anticipated storyline of the episode is yet available but it seems likely that the words "Spoilers!" and "Hello Sweetie!" will feature liberally throughout the script. Alex Kingston, at least, is delighted to be returning as her frizzy-haired science fiction alter ego: "To be honest, I did not know whether

Book News

Miwk Publishing have released details of two forthcoming books which chronicle the lives and work of two legendary figures from the history of the original **Doctor Who** series. **A Peculiar Effect on the BBC**, due to be published this month (September), is the posthumous memoir (written in the 1990s) of Bernard Wilkie, a genuine pioneer in the world of TV visual effects who, together with his colleague Jack Kine, established the BBC's first, rudimentary Visual Effects Department in 1954. Across the next twenty-four years, Wilkie helped revolutionise the world of television effects and the book chronicles his work on landmark British TV productions such as **1984**, **Quatermass** and, of course, **Doctor Who**, on which he worked extensively in the 1960s and '70s. October sees the release of **To Put You in the Picture**, the memoir of Robert Banks Stewart, one of the UK's most acclaimed TV writers/producers whose work spans over five decades. Best known as the creator of BBC detective dramas **Shoestring** and **Bergerac**, Banks Stewart also contributed to shows as diverse as **The Darling Buds of May** and **Lovejoy**. In 1975, he wrote the first of his two scripts for **Doctor Who**. **Terror of the Zygons** opened Tom Baker's second series and introduced the foetus-like shape-shifting Zygons, who returned to the series in 2013's anniversary special and who will be back in a two-part story in Series Nine. In 1976, Baker's second season concluded with Banks Stewart's second serial, the popular **Seeds of Doom**, a **Thing from Another World**-inspired yarn which sees the Doctor and Sarah Jane (Elisabeth Sladen) battle the alien Krynoid creature, which germinates from an alien seed pod discovered buried in the Antarctic. The serial, famously criticised by contemporary TV Standards Watchdog Mary Whitehouse for its 'graphic' depiction of "obscene vegetable matter", features a show-stopping turn by the late Tony Beckley as urbane millionaire baddy Harrison Chase. Both books can be ordered online from Miwk.



UNDERWATER MENACE to Surface On DVD At Last?

The on-again/off-again status of the proposed DVD release of episodes two and three of 1967 Patrick Troughton serial *The Underwater Menace* (episode two was returned to the BBC Archive in 2011), the last episodes from the 'classic' series yet to be made commercially available by the BBC, is almost certainly more interesting than the story itself. The episodes were initially slated for release on DVD in 2014, with the missing parts expected to be recreated via animation in the style of previous incomplete serials such as *The Invasion* and *The Ice Warriors*. However, in February this year, BBC Worldwide confirmed that the DVD had been removed from their release schedule and as recently as June it appeared that there were absolutely no plans for the disc – for which supporting 'special feature' material was filmed and recorded some time ago – to be made available. At the beginning of September, the disc suddenly appeared as a pre-release on the BBC's online store and shortly afterwards the BBC formally confirmed that the DVD will receive a UK release on October 26th. It is understood at this stage that the missing episodes will be represented by 'Telesnap' (on-screen images captured photographically at the time of the story's only UK transmission) reconstructions rather than the planned, more costly, animation.

BAFTA Cymru Nods for DOCTOR WHO

Doctor Who has received five nominations in this year's BAFTA Cymru Awards, which honour excellence in broadcasting and production within film and television in Wales. Peter Capaldi has been nominated as Best Actor for his performance as the Doctor in Series Eight's *Dark Water*, whilst his companion Jenna Coleman (Clara Oswald) has been recognised for her work in *Kill the Moon* (aka the one with the egg). Will Oswald, an editor on **Doctor Who** since 2007 (and a previous winner in the editing category in 2001 and 2008), is nominated for his work on *Dark Water*, the Production Team are short-listed for Best Visual and Special Effects for the 2014 Festive special *Last Christmas* and the new title sequence for the series features in the list of nominees in the Best Titles and Graphic Identity category. The winners will be announced at a ceremony held in Cardiff's St David's Hotel on September 27th. **Outside the Box** says 'good luck!' to all the nominees and we'll report on the winners and losers next month.

WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



For the last five years, Steven Moffat has been in charge of creating *Doctor Who* on budgets generally lower than those that Russell T Davies had been working with, and yet the episodes he has produced have by and large looked much more cinematic. One of the reasons for this is something that was already a signature of Moffat's past body of work, and that is his reliance on a small core cast around which to spin his stories. While Davies would often include a fairly large number of secondary speaking roles, particularly in his series finales, Moffat is much more inclined to scale things down – often writing episodes revolving entirely around his principals and recurring guests. Even the most hard-pressed of fans would struggle to name more than half a dozen speaking parts in *The Big Bang* off the top of their heads, for instance – although ironically, the cast list is actually as long as the one that accompanied *Last of the Time Lords* back in 2007.

It's just the way Moffat's mind seems to work, and regardless of whether he's writing

Press Gang, *Doctor Who* or *Joking Apart*, he tends to prefer writing stories about his main characters, rather than plots that include them but have their focus elsewhere. For fifty years it's been called *Doctor Who*, but it's only since the series returned in 2005 that the Doctor has actually been in the spotlight, never more so than since 2010.

One of the side effects of this shift in tone in the series has been to draw the limelight away from what had previously been its main attraction: the monsters. It's telling that after production was complete on Davies' first series in charge, the one which most resembles Moffat's latter series in many ways, the then-showrunner was taken aside by BBC Head of Drama Jane Tranter and encouraged to include more monsters. Some might see this as a cynical exercise in promoting the manufacture of new toys, but in reality it was probably prompted more by a sense of nostalgia for the monster-heavy days of the late 1960s and early 1970s, wherein rarely a story went by without a new creature design (or redesign) hogging the limelight. By the time Davies was drawing towards the end

of his run, stories like *Midnight* were very much the exception during a run of stories in which viewers would be introduced (or reintroduced) to Adipose, Pyroviles, Ood, Sontarans, Hath, a Vespi-form and the space-suited Vashta Nerada cadavers, before ultimately re-engaging with the Daleks and their creator, Davros.

Two years later, Series Five introduced Matt Smith as the Eleventh Doctor, and already the use of monsters in the programme had begun to decline. *The Eleventh Hour*, *The Beast Below*, and *Vincent and the Doctor* included new creatures almost as an afterthought, while even the finale relied exclusively upon reused costumes in minor (and mainly non-speaking) parts while the main thrust of the plot played out between the principal cast only. It's a far cry from the days of Patrick Troughton and Jon Pertwee, when the audience's main concern would be "What's the Doctor facing this week?" Pertwee's comment about a Yeti "on the loo in Tooting Bec" is significant because of the way it pre-assumes the inclinations of the series' viewers.

In some ways, reducing the number of new creatures might feel like a diminishing of the programme. A series of episodes in which the focal point is spoonheaded body doubles, the future selves of the main cast, a small red chest-hugging insect and Richard E. Grant might not feel as vivid as the bygone days of Autons, Axons and Uxarieans, but there are other benefits to be had. *Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS* is an almost traditional adventure story with the setting as its primary character, Grant's 'iconic' role is given heft by his appearance in previous *Doctor Who* spinoffs playing the Doctor himself, and there's nothing more monstrous than Diana Rigg's turn in *The Crimson Horror*. Furthermore, there is now considerably less reliance on the old 'aliens invade' standby, and less need to try and find interesting and unusual ways of telling the same story – and providing plausible motivations for any number of consecutive alien invaders.

Instead, we are in the middle of a period during which the high concepts are generally attached to story conceits rather than plot mechanics. *In the Forest of the Night* might be criminally underrated, but it couldn't exist in a system whereby the writers' first thought needed to be, "What's the monster's role in this story?" By the same token, neither could *Listen* – and even *The Day of the Doctor* is established around a situation rather than the identity of its enemy. Modern audiences are now as accustomed to asking "What's the idea this week?" as they are expectant of a new monster. In fact, the *Doctor Who* of today passes a closer resemblance to the *Astounding Science Fiction* of the 1940s than it does the Creature Features of the decade that followed – or perhaps the kind of *Doctor Who* that Verity Lambert oversaw in 1963, and Graham Williams fifteen years later, rather than Innes Lloyd and Barry Letts' visions of the series.

Which is not to say that Moffat's *Doctor Who* has ignored the monsters altogether. Both the Daleks and Cybermen are still fairly regular presences in the



programme (as are Moffat's own creation, the Weeping Angels) – if not necessarily the focus whenever they do appear – and equally the Ice Warriors and Zygons have returned after forty-year absences to some degree of success. *The Impossible Astronaut* and *Flatline* have managed to tell scintillating stories which revolved very explicitly around new alien menaces, and *The God Complex* and *Mummy on the Orient Express* have combined interesting and sometimes innovative storytelling with old-fashioned creature effects and designs.

A less popular new facet to the programme with old school fans, but more popular perhaps among newer audiences, has been the development of the so-called Paternoster Gang (or the 'Menagerie à Trois'), which has featured not only a friendly Silurian (something almost given precedence in their first appearance) but also a good Sontaran – something that would have seemed sacrilegious back in the 1970s! In these times of integrated cultural variety, though, it perhaps isn't so much of a surprise to see the Doctor on good terms with members of previously antagonistic alien species – and it's not like *The Curse of Peladon* didn't get there

first. Indeed, the existence of Madame Vastra and Strax is an example of two different elements of the modern series, and modern television in general; on the one hand, the more sophisticated idea that species aren't defined by their warriors (the classic series very often included terribly generic monster races characterised by just a single trait), and secondly the notion of a contained universe, beyond Davies' simple predilection for the companions' next-of-kin – something that's entirely consistent with Moffat's penchant for telling stories about his regular and recurring characters.

For *Doctor Who* in 2015, the monsters aren't nearly as important as the characters and the situations, and never was this more in evidence than in Series Eight, through the course of which Steven Moffat managed to tell quite a complicated story about the Doctor himself (as mirrored in and informed by the drama surrounding his companion). This is something that has generally been impossible in a series about an eponymous character who almost by definition cannot change or develop in any significant way, in spite of being able to regularly alter his face and idiosyncrasies.

Which is not to say that once Moffat moves on, *Doctor Who* won't change again – and Moffat's Doctor-centric stories will undoubtedly go the same way as the historicals, the UNIT era and the bickering companions, back when their respective creators had been replaced by new production teams with different ideas. Even Russell T Davies' modern, teen-friendly, post-*Twilight* romance is now seemingly a thing of the past, with the brief flirtation between Amy Pond and Matt Smith's Doctor just the ghost of an echo of something that at the time had seemed so central to the series' success.

No doubt the next showrunner, or maybe the one after that, will fall in love with the idea of *Doctor Who* as The Monster Show once again. And maybe then we'll get back to the kind of programme that *Doctor Who* used to be, back when it wasn't periodically being something else.

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT





YOU ONLY LIVE TWELVE TIMES...

We've had *The Man with the Golden Gun* - now we revisit a man with a well-placed recorder! *The Invasion* served as something of a dummy run for the sort of Earth-based adventure that Jon Pertwee's Third Doctor would enjoy after taking the TARDIS key from Patrick Troughton's Second, as well as allowing things to go a bit Bond. The name's Doctor, the Doctor...

And there are a few loose ends from *The Web of Fear* into the bargain. It looks like Professor Travers will be required once more as the visual stabiliser circuit's knackered and he's the only man around who can fix it - this being the late sixties/early seventies such Q-ish boffins are all the rage. The landing there couldn't have come at a more opportune moment, either, following a bit of a scrape near the Moon.

JAMIE: Where are we? What's that?

ZOE: It's the Moon, isn't it, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Yes, yes. That's the dark side of the Moon. We seem to have stopped in space.

ZOE: I remember seeing this before.

DOCTOR: Shush, Zoe. That light on the Moon's surface. Do you see it?

ZOE: Doctor! It's getting bigger! It's coming towards us!

DOCTOR: Zoe, that's a missile!

JAMIE: A what?

ZOE: It's a missile! Somebody's fired a missile at us, Jamie! Oh Doctor, come on, let's get out of here.

DOCTOR: Now don't fuss me, Zoe.

which means hitching a lift to London as well as dropping the first hint of developing mystery. Further investigation will obviously be required, International Electromatics at the heart of the intrigue!

ZOE: Which company?

MAN: Come on, there's only one company.

DOCTOR: Well, you see, we're strangers around here.

MAN: Strangers? You're not from the community, then?

DOCTOR: No.

MAN: Then how did you get inside the compound?

DOCTOR: Well, that's rather a long story.

You see...

ZOE: This community you talked about, are they prisoners here then?

MAN: Those who haven't gone over to

the company are, yes. Not that they say you can't get out. They just make it pretty impossible without passes.

JAMIE: You can move in and out.

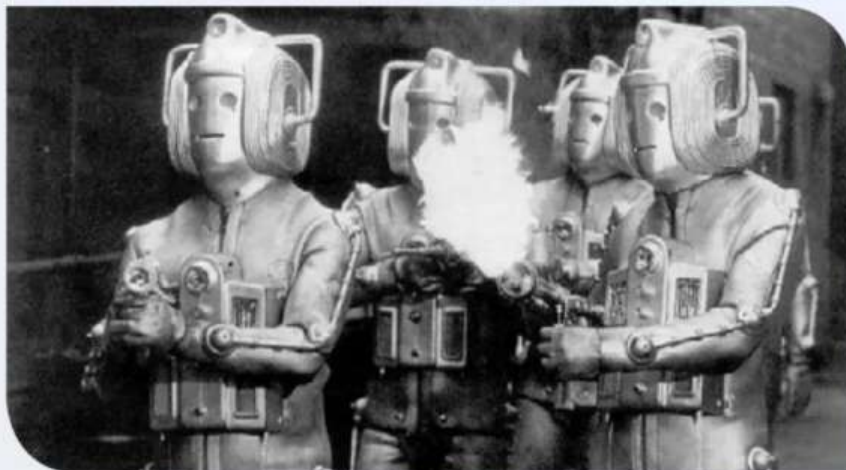
MAN: I got in all right. But getting out might be just a bit more difficult.

DOCTOR: This company, what do they do?

MAN: International Electromatics. Now surely you've heard of them?

It shouldn't be too much of a surprise to learn that *Doctor Who*'s own answer to the Secret Service Her Majesty's so proud of soon got involved. They too had made their bow in the *Web of Fear*, and Lethbridge-Stewart has since won a hard-earned promotion from Colonel to Brigadier.

DOCTOR: But what's all this, and why all the cloak and dagger stuff to bring us here?





BRIGADIER: Yes, I'm sorry about that, but my chaps have to be a bit melodramatic in their methods. But I'll explain. Look, do sit down.

JAMIE: Thank you.

DOCTOR: How nice.

BRIGADIER: Oh, Sergeant Walters!

WALTERS: Yes sir?

BRIGADIER: Lay on some tea, will you?

DOCTOR: Oh thank you, and a patty cake biscuit. Thank you.

BRIGADIER: Yes, well, since the Yeti do, I've been in charge of an independent intelligence group that we call UNIT. That's United Nations Intelligence Taskforce.

JAMIE: You mean you're like a world secret police.

BRIGADIER: Not quite. We don't actually arrest people, just investigate them.

JAMIE: But what about us? I mean, you arrested us.

BRIGADIER: Not really. You see, my men were keeping a watch on the International Electromatics Headquarters when you two showed up. I've been keeping a check on everyone going in that building. Your photographs were transmitted to this Headquarters and I recognised you.

And the success of the mission against the Cybermen, who fired the dirty great missile that brought the TARDIS crashing down in the first place and are here in league with industrialist Tobias Vaughn, could be seen to play a large part in the Brig's eventual job offer of sorts post-*The War Games*. Well, as he's unable to leave Earth, the Doctor will need something to tide him over following the shedding of his lovably rumpled face and sentence to exile. **"But you, you can't condemn me to exile on one primitive planet in one century in time! Besides, I'm known on the Earth. It might be very awkward for me..."**

Eight selves on from their trip into London's sewers, he'll catch a brief glimpse of an *Invasion*-era Cyberman

head down in Henry Van Statten's vault in Utah - a nod repaid in the animated segments of the DVD release of *The Invasion* with 'Bad Wolf' graffiti appearing on Isobel's wall, which she uses as a large-scale notepad for some reason!

Having discovered that Travers' house is in the care of one Professor Watkins and his niece Isobel, and with the Professor gone missing, the Doctor must take Jamie with him in a bid to mount a rescue mission.

JAMIE: Doctor, do you suppose this firm could be the one that driver was talking about?

DOCTOR: Oh, I'm sure of it.

JAMIE: In that case, Watkins could have been kidnapped!

DOCTOR: Ah, Jamie. You mustn't let your imagination run away with you. I must admit, it's a bit strange.

WOMAN: International Electromatics Company. State your business.

DOCTOR: I would like, please, to speak with Professor Watkins.

WOMAN: One moment. Party not available.

DOCTOR: Oh, yes, you see, but this is very important.

WOMAN: Party not available.

DOCTOR: Yes, but I must speak with him.

WOMAN: Party not available. Party not available.

DOCTOR: But this is an automatic answering device! Ah, shut up, you stupid machine!

JAMIE: Now what?

DOCTOR: There's only one thing for it. We'll have to go there ourselves.

You can just hear the first notes of Monty Norman's famous theme, right? And we'll later see our Paul McCartney-indebted hero thrust into an action sequence of which 007 would no doubt have approved - from *Doctor Who* to *Dr No* in a single seamless transition!

DOCTOR: Look behind you!

BRIGADIER: Doctor, get down! Right, bazooka! You all right, Doctor?

DOCTOR: What? Yes, yes, it's there, in that building. The radio transmitter control, you've got to destroy it!

BRIGADIER: Leave it to us. Forward!

All this after he and Jamie had rescued Zoe and Isobel from capture with the aid of an official UNIT helicopter. That urge to hum the Bond theme just won't go away...

JAMIE: You're not going to leave the lassies by themselves are you?

DOCTOR: No, no, of course not. Help me to get this over the side there. Right. Down you go, Jamie.

JAMIE: Eh?

The only real difference is seeing the Time Lord somehow not ending up in bed with either one of the lovelies he's rescued by the final act. At least, that's how most people remember it. He would, of course, return for *The Krotons* - shaken, not stirred!

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



STARBURST

REVIEWS

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH PAUL MOUNT



THE SIXTH DOCTOR: THE LAST ADVENTURE

PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / STARRING: COLIN BAKER, MICHAEL JAYSTON, INDIA FISHER, LISA GREENWOOD, BONNIE LANGFORD, SYLVESTER MCCOY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After Doctor Who's 23rd season and the epic The Trial of a Time Lord saga finished, it was sadly announced that Colin Baker would no longer play the Doctor, and that Sylvester McCoy would be taking over the role for the show's remaining three series. A final regeneration story was never offered to Baker, and he even turned down the offer to film a regeneration sequence for the beginning of series 24's opening episode,

Time and the Rani. But now, 31 years later, we will finally get to experience the events leading up to the Sixth Doctor's fatal moment in Big Finish's eagerly anticipated The Sixth Doctor: The Last Adventure. Structured similarly to Trial of a Time Lord, The Last Adventure sees the Sixth Doctor involved in four different adventures across time and space, all connected by his old adversary: the Valeyard, the dark manifestation of the Doctor.

Even though each story has a different and unique style and tone, each of them feels like a celebration of Colin's Doctor. In fact, this four-part story offers a more exciting and stronger story arc than TV's Trial of a Time Lord, which felt like a mixed bag with equal parts good and bad. Despite being an audio drama, The Last Adventure is more solidly structured and offers more creative storylines for Colin's Doctor to get involved in.

The first story, End of the Line, is a chilling take that puts a dark satirical spin on commuting and all its downsides. The writers, Simon Barnard and Paul Morris, have been given a challenge, not just to make the multi-layered concept exciting, but introducing Constance Clarke to listeners, and Miranda Raison (Tallulah in 2007's Daleks in Manhattan two-parter) does deliver a very likeable and charming performance. Alan Barnes' The Red House is an adventure with werewolves and Sixth/Eighth Doctor companion Charley Pollard. This story boasts an impressive

cast, a richly textured environment, and a typically ballsy performance from India Fisher, who has great scenes with the Valeyard. It would've easily made a great TV episode.

Matt Fritton's Stage Fright is a witty and sharp Victorian thriller that sees a pleasurable juxtaposition of combining modern street-wise Phillipa Jackson with Victorian heroes Jago and Litefoot, with Christopher Benjamin and Trevor Baxter still making a delightful double-act and Lisa Greenwood brilliantly combining feistiness and vulnerability. Nicholas Briggs' The Brink of Death is a fitting send-off for Colin's Doctor, and even though we know how it ends, it doesn't spoil the enjoyment. Mel does get sidelined, but Liz White is brilliant as sub-companion Genesta. It provides a suitable conclusion to the ongoing story threads of The Last Adventure, whilst also wrapping up the Doctor's battle with the Valeyard, and thankfully it doesn't devolve into becoming self-indulgent or anti-climactic.

Funny, sad, scary and thought-provoking with great performances throughout (especially from Colin himself) and consistently solid writing from across the board, The Last Adventure gives the Sixth Doctor the farewell he deserves, and is the fitting paean to the Colin Baker era.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★ 9



DOCTOR WHO: ROYAL BLOOD

AUTHOR: UNA MCCORMACK / PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The tale of the Holy Grail is older than any of us, so it's no surprise that the show which is almost the epitome of Britishness

should finally tackle one of the great British myths. How fitting that this particular exploration should take place on the printed page, where Malory's tales have enthralled impressionable and gullible children for years.

But a straight-up take on the Grail quest would be boring, standard... not things Doctor Who does well at all. So as usual, there's kinky space stuff going on as the Doctor and Clara pop up on a world in the last days of a bloody war. This leads into an ongoing storyline about the Glamour, one of the most powerful and motivating artefacts in the universe. What's really neat about it is that, though this storyline continues over the other two books in this wave of releases (Deep Time and The Big Bang Generation), you could just leave it here if you want to. The story that Royal Blood tells is more or less self-contained and satisfying in its own right. But why should you stop after this one? McCormack has the characters of the Doctor and Clara down to a 'T', and if the other two authors are anywhere near

as good in this regard then they will also be essential reading. We'll be picking them up off the back of reading this one because we just have to know how the Glamour storyline ends.

The only issue we had with this novel (though we can appreciate why it happened; literary experimentation sometimes comes with a price) was that the decision to tell part of the story from a historical and first person point of view meant that some of the events of the climax turn out to be a foregone conclusion, which takes away a lot of the suspense.

But this is forgivable in an otherwise excellent book, and if BBC Wales ever decide to adapt this one for television, they could do a lot worse than getting McCormack herself on board. Hell, we'll be favoured with good fortune if the show turns out anything near this level of quality come September 19th.

SCOTT VARNHAM

★★★★★★★★★ 9

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It's an iconic, if baffling, cinematic image – a disembodied stone head floating in the sky and James Bond wearing a nappy. Welcome to ZARDOZ...

THE FUTURE DOESN'T WORK

By Ed Fortune

Some films are lauded as classics because they bring something new and unique to our growing culture. Others are incredibly technically accomplished, changing the state of the art forever. Others still hold a haunting, timeless quality that speak to our very being and cannot be replicated. In the case of John Boorman's *Zardoz*, however, it's none of those. *Zardoz* is a classic because it's a glorious mess of science fiction ideas and '70s strangeness that also features a young and muscular Sean Connery wearing very little for most of the movie.

Zardoz is set in the year 2293 on a post-apocalyptic Earth and was filmed in 1974's Ireland (Ireland is still the go-to place for grim and dismal wastelands; it's where they film a lot of *Game of Thrones*). Connery plays Zed, a wasteland warrior clad only in extremely short red pants and a red bandolier – though at one point he wears a white wedding dress. Zed and his clan of Exterminators worship a giant stone floating head, called *Zardoz*. Zed discovers the secrets behind his God and finds his way into The Vortex, a heavily

protected and secluded zone filled with immortal humans who have grown bored and strange with the weight of years.

The plot is so haphazard and odd that it tends to appear in the top ranks of weird movie lists. Boorman, who both wrote and directed the feature, drew upon the likes of Aldous Huxley's story *After Many a Summer* and the third part of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. As an idea, it's classic science fiction. It's an examination of human nature and human sexuality and posits the consequences of immortality and hubris. The central premise revolves around the use of religion as a form of social control, though in this case the holy book turns out to be something rather unexpected.

Boorman was well aware that his movie was difficult for audiences to swallow at the time. His solution was to open the feature with the character of Arthur Frayn, whose disembodied head bobs around the screen rambling on about the line between illusion and religion. It doesn't help that Frayn has drawn on his beard

and moustache in magic marker, and it looks like he's wearing his boxer shorts as a hat. The explanation doesn't help. It really doesn't.

Boorman at the time was a rising force in the movie industry. After the commercial and critical success of *Deliverance* (which he directed and partially rewrote), he could basically indulge himself. He initially cast *Deliverance* star Burt Reynolds to take on the role of Zed, but the actor was unable to film due to a hernia. It's also worth noting that Burt had recently shot to fame, thanks in part to this role and a well-timed nude centrefold in *Cosmopolitan*. Reynolds was also angling for a role as Bond at the time. Meanwhile, Sean Connery was both desperate to shake off his 007 image and finding it hard to find work after appearing in the mostly forgotten, but recently re-issued, police drama stinker *The Offence*. Connery's fee cost one-fifth of the film's total million dollar budget but was well worth it. Boorman and Connery are still friends to this day and got on very well during the filming.

The bulk of the budget went on special effects, so much so that they skimped on a lot of other things. For example, they stretched the costume budget by simply painting on parts of the barbarian's gear, rather than using actual clothes. The giant head was modelled on Boorman's own face (making the director the literal and figurative God of the movie). The large prop was dangled on a crane and was pretty problematic. They didn't have enough room in the studio to film the flying head scenes, so they used the parking lot instead. The head would get the movie into trouble from the French press, who thought it was the head of Lenin. Many of the hippy clothes used by the immortals were quilts the director had acquired while making *Deliverance*. Of course, the entire 'no budget for clothes' may have just been an excuse to have most of the actors wander around in next to nothing. *Zardoz* is notorious for its rampant (yet not terribly sexual) nudity.

Other effects were also quite problematic. One key scene involves Connery and his co-star Charlotte Rampling ageing rapidly. It's an incredible moment (although also appropriately odd), but of course, this required the use of lots of facial make-up. Seemingly, Connery does not like having his face touched too much. The long and challenging scene took three attempts to shoot and, at one point, to say Connery apparently got quite annoyed at the technical team is an understatement.



Seventies audiences were not really ready for the movie, and it was a critical and commercial flop. Commentators to this day doubt if we will ever truly be ready for *Zardoz*. Legendary film critic Roger Ebert described it at the time as "A trip into a future that seems ruled by perpetually stoned set decorators" and also, "an exercise in self-indulgence". He's not wrong. Boorman said many years later that "It was the '70s, and I was doing a lot of drugs. Frankly, even I'm not entirely sure what parts of the movie are about". This alone has made the movie a gift to film studies students across the world; not only is it well-produced and crammed with metaphor, but it's also a great example of pretension in filmmaking. Ironically, one of the key themes of *Zardoz* is also hubris.

Zardoz is very much a Boorman movie. Throughout, he uses one critical piece of music (Beethoven's 7th) to evoke mood and drama, and this is a technique he used heavily in both *Deliverance* and his later works. *Zardoz*, however, is not the lowest point in

the director's career. The next film he helmed was *The Exorcist 2: The Heretic*, a movie roundly regarded as ridiculous and awful. Luckily, he ploughed on to pursue another dream project; sword and sorcery epic *Excalibur*, for which he won an award at Cannes and is generally regarded as a fantasy classic. He went on to greater heights from there. *Zardoz* also gave Sean Connery the (literal and figurative) exposure he needed, and despite the movie itself being a flop, the in-your-face physicality of the movie did his career no harm at all.

The movie went on to inspire similarly crazy projects around the world and in other sorts of media. There's even a DC Comics villain (called Vartox) who's based loosely on the character of Zed. As odd as *Zardoz* seems, its significance should not be underestimated. It is a true classic because of its overly indulgent storyline and crazy scenes and deserves a place on your movie shelf.

ZARDOZ is available now on Blu-ray, released by Arrow Video.

LIVVY BOOTE is...

THE GIRL FROM X PLANET X

I'm an anime fan. I love watching giant, animated titans chasing people. I adore settling down and enjoying some silly, fun high school anime. And you can't find anything quite so wonderfully surreal anywhere else. The freedom of animation combined with an open mind creates some of the most amazing, terrifying, hilarious, fascinating shows... well, ever. I really love how much anime can do.

What I don't love is how unbearably sexist it can be as a genre.

If you're an anime fan and a feminist, you'll have been in this position before: your friend has recommended a show to you, they've been raving about it for ages, and you think, hey, I've got some time on my hands. Each episode's only 20 minutes long - looks like you've got a long night of Netflix ahead of you. *Perfect*.

So you get comfortable, you press play, the episode starts, and you're seeing what your friend's raving about - the design of the fictional universe is brilliant. The characters are interesting. It's witty, it's compelling - yep, looks like you're not gonna be going to sleep anytime soon.

And then, a new character comes on screen. She's cute. In fact, she's so

cute that she sort of looks like she's 12 or younger. And then the screen does a gratuitous sweep of her body, and you're hit with the realisation that no, she's not actually meant to be a child, because no child, no *human* has a bust to waist ratio like that. They would quite literally snap. She's nervously holding her hands in front of her, pulling down her skirt, looking up at the main character from behind long eyelashes - a look that says less 'come hither' and more 'I've been created to fulfil a weird fetish aimed towards male fans and I'm not enjoying it'.

Of course, your feminist alarm bells start ringing - this is a *terrible* female character! She's unrealistic in pretty much every way, her personality is the stereotypical caring mother figure or heartless bitch, and she's there purely to turn on the male audience, whilst female viewers just have to let it wash over them - including those interested in women, because seriously, these anime characters aren't attractive to us at all. I wonder why? Because it's just hugely offensive to us to see our gender treated like this, like female characters serve to be sexy.

You don't even need to venture into

the world of *hentai* to see this; just take a look at *One Piece* or *Fairy Tail*.

When I start a new series and I encounter this sort of thing, I feel I ought to stop watching. But I don't. I keep watching because I love pretty much everything else about the show. Does that make me a bad feminist? Am I encouraging this fetishism, bordering on paedophilia, by watching such anime? Am I promoting the terrible body standards of the show by continuing to watch it?

Or, perhaps you should ask yourself, whether it's in your place to do anything about the situation; after all, you're talking about a show that's a product of a very, very different culture.

Anime originates from Japan. Japan is a fascinating country, a different world to that of the United Kingdom or The USA. I recently went there for a month; my visit brought me some of the best times of my life, and some of the most confusing. There were many things that I had to adapt about myself in order to be respectful, considering the fact that I was a foreign woman in Tokyo.

Japan is the home of some bizarre things. Strange anime, vending machines



The Classic "Oh no, my bikini top broke!" pose....

CONSIDERING THE HYPERSEXUALISATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN ANIME, CAN YOU BE A FAN AND A FEMINIST?

selling wigs for dogs, over-stimulating adverts that look like they're the product of a bad trip; but above all that, it's enormously reserved. Japan is a much quieter place, something I noticed quickly as a person without much of an 'inside voice'. And the women, in particular, in certain situations, are expected to be quieter; more aware of their emotional responses. As you might expect, this is a tradition that is fading with the rise of women's rights - for example, women are no longer required to cover their mouth when they laugh in public - but there is still the lingering sense that they should be more reserved than the rest, something that's hard to shake off after centuries of tradition.

If you're a woman who lives in London, you've probably had to sit next to a business man on the tube at some point. And you know that more often than not, they like to spread their legs over the space of three seats and put their briefcase somewhere inconvenient, because they apparently deserve more space than you - currently folded up like a trestle table in the seat next to him. Sometimes, those sort of guys don't even seem to realise you exist. The same sort of thing happens in Tokyo. Plus, on the trains, there's a big groping problem.

And then, there's Japan's attitude towards women who work and don't have a family. There are lists of lovely,



The "Goodness, you caught us getting changed!" pose.



Mikasa from ATTACK ON TITAN is a great example of a good anime female character.

derogatory names for women who do this, and even nicer ones for women who decide they don't want to pursue love. I think one of them translates as something like 'dried fish'.

So it's not an easy place to be if you're a woman, but it's also a wonderful place. Women have started a trend of getting married to their independence; no groom, no couple, just you having a big party to celebrate the fact that you're happy by yourself. Also, I mean, aside from women's rights, there's the insanely good food and fascinating culture.

It's an amazing place. It's a very different place. Japan's gender politics are something that I often grumble about - but it's not something I will try to form a real opinion on, it's not a topic I'll confidently enter a debate about. You won't find me lecturing my Japanese friends about how I disagree with the treatment of women in their country or their characterisation of women in anime.

I've had men practically walk *through* me when I was at work in Tokyo as if I didn't exist. My friends who live there have horror stories about being groped on the train home. And the insanely unrealistic, busty, child-like female characters you find in anime really rile me up. But what can I do about it? Absolutely nothing. Really, I *shouldn't* do anything.

You may disagree, but I see it this way - you need to follow what was known as the 'prime directive' in *Star Trek*. When checking up on a world that has a culture

either less developed or more developed than your own, you must only take invasive action in emergencies. In other words - no matter how little Captain Kirk liked to ignore this rule - their culture is none of your business. You can't assume that strolling in with your own morals and your own rules and imposing them on a society that's so very different is helpful. It is, in fact, quite arrogant, and more often than not, it's destructive rather than productive.

I don't like the representation of women in anime. But why does my opinion matter? Anime is the product of a complex society, one that doesn't necessarily follow the same rules as my own. Japan has its own history, its own culture, its own people, and I have no control over it, and no right to control it. Even if I think that its women should be treated with more respect.

There are plenty of problems within my own country, within my own culture, within my own media and television programmes that I *can* help fix. That *is* my place. So I'll focus on that instead. Because pretending that anime is more problematic than some stuff you find in the UK is not just absurd, but also a horribly self-important way to look at things. Besides, some anime have the best female characters out there. Mikasa from *Attack on Titan*, Maka from *Soul Eater*, basically all the women in *Fullmetal Alchemist*...

So, yes, I will turn off my feminist alarm bells. I'll press play. And I'll continue to enjoy my show with my oh-so-important Western opinions kept to myself.

COUNTDOWN TO ADVENTURE :

CELEBRATING



September 30th, 1965 was an important date in TV fantasy lore. It saw the debut of Gerry Anderson's **THUNDERBIRDS**. To commemorate the show's 50th anniversary, we have a look at what makes the show so special...

It's something of a paradox how for all its visionary impact and breath-taking level of entertainment, *Thunderbirds* was a show born out of circumstance, not out of choice. It spiralled out of the position Gerry Anderson found himself in at the time - despising marionettes and their inability to convey the physical and emotional range we humans take for granted, thereby discovering that mecha-heavy science fiction was the only way out in making some quality TV.

And yet for all its lack of natural choice on the part of its makers, there was still an immensely organic background to the show. Both combining and building on the rugged, earthen shenanigans of Mike Mercury and the Black Rock gang in *Supercar*, the overly bonkers tales of outer space wonder for Steve Zodiac in *Fireball XL5*, and the lush underwater Cold War kingdoms Troy Tempest had to contend

with in *Stingray*, the result was something we still adore, discuss, parody, and more.

Bizarrely, for all those shots where you saw the puppets being practically dragged across the floor in an attempt to make them walk convincingly, everything in *Thunderbirds* just works. Even more bizarrely, when one looks at *Thunderbirds* from afar, it shouldn't work at all. The blatant fact that it's the Thunderbird machines themselves who are the stars of the show, and not the Tracy brothers, combined with their surface level personalities, doesn't exactly give the audience a lot of emotional hook. And for how long can the audience itself, a family one in *Thunderbirds'* case, be entertained by the perfectly caricatured yet somewhat emotionless marionette heroes?

So how the thundering heck does this show survive? Why, after half a century, do we still get hairs on the back of our necks every time Jeff emits those immortal words "*Go ahead, John*", the starting gun for an hour's worth of thrills and spills? Because *Thunderbirds* has bags of soul, that's why. Arguably, *Thunderbirds* did what Pixar mastered some 30 years after the exploits of *International Rescue* - thanks to its slow-burning pace, the audience

gets emotionally rewarded with each successful rescue. It's a definite puzzle that Anderson came up with the concept of sticking his marionette characters in these beautiful machines in order to give the impression that the action galloped along, and yet *Thunderbirds* demands its audience to sit and be patient as each rescue merely slithers.

Spinning off from this, audiences surely can latch on to the utopian future that *Thunderbirds* took place in. The world of 2065 was (or should that read 'will be?') an idealised paradise of technological genius. It was everything that made *Gundam*, *Star Wars*, and even *Thomas the Tank Engine* insanely popular on a visual scale. Without any wish to, Gerry Anderson may well have paved the way for the mega-vehicle franchises that had the ingenious power to make the world's parents scream with agony at the knowledge they had to buy all the toys from the show. It's not just the entertainment factor you had to thank *Thunderbirds* for, but it's also why your parents were stony broke.

And speaking of the future, even that couldn't escape how *Thunderbirds* is rather riddled in conundrums. The snug nature of *Thunderbirds* was always key to how entertaining it remained. The world of 2065 was such a stupidly, hilariously,

THUNDERBIRDS AT 50

BY FRED McNAMARA



perfectly imperfect world where anything that could go wrong did go wrong - if you were a Fireflash pilot, or a Sun Probe astronaut, or a Crablogger driver, you were screwed. And yet for all the disasters that plagued this world, there was never any genuine threat, not just because you had International Rescue at your disposal, but because of the sheer optimism of the show. *Thunderbirds* is so darn cheerful that not even the Hood manages to provide any genuine danger; he of all people can't escape the idealism that *Thunderbirds* promotes. He can't succeed in his plans to steal the secrets of International Rescue, nor can he get a taste of his own medicine - how the hell can anyone survive that car blow-up in 'Trapped in the Sky'? Lady Penelope obliterates the car that the Hood's stolen, but he emerges Looney Tunes-like with only a few scratches!

Another enigma the show has is its jaw-dropping ability to capture all the proto-cinematic universe adrenaline and perfectly scale it down into cosy, teatime family viewing, without losing any of its impact. Your dad could nod in quiet agreement with Jeff as he leads his son through perilous rescue after perilous rescue, whilst your mum would paw at the TV screen wishing that someday you'd grow up to marry someone as wickedly

cool as Lady Penelope.

That level of optimism found in *Thunderbirds* has a lot to do with the aforementioned amount of soul the show projected. For all the lack of depth in the characters, you found yourself carving their personalities out of the very wood from which these heroic puppets were constructed. Perhaps that points to another reason we love *Thunderbirds* so much - a tangible sense of interaction between audience and programme. The characters have a blank enough slate for the audience to paint their own pictures of personality on, and the dazzling use of models made playing with the many, many, MANY toys you can now buy from the show bring a new level of playability to toys in general.

But beyond the commercialism, the warmth radiates, even fifty years onward. Even if *Thunderbirds* had no characters, story or concept whatsoever, you could pore over the model sets and miniatures used to bring the show to life. Even if there was the occasional accidental moment when you could spot where the model set ends and the studio begins (try taking a gander at 'Attack of the Alligators!' where Virgil takes Alan up to fix the aerial tower on Tracy

Island), the level of artistry used dwarfed many other sci-fi shows at the time. That fusion of the idealised future and perfectly constructed model worlds embodies the positivity found in *Thunderbirds*.

But it wasn't just the world of *Thunderbirds* itself we loved, it was the stories that took place in Century 21. The show is filled with stories that move as slowly as Thunderbird 2 rolling along its runway, yet even at their most basic level, each episode offered audiences a deafening roar of rocket-powered adventure with a scope and atmosphere that had the power to make you forget you were ever watching a show arguably aimed at children more than their parents. Some episodes did fall into the 50-minute trap and wound up being more than pedestrian, but by *Thunderbirds* standards, a pedestrian episode still had something to thrill your socks off.

And at its best, *Thunderbirds* could be hilariously





awesome. Take 'Terror in New York City' for example. That jittering, slowed-down shot of the Empire State Building collapsing down from the viewpoint of Ned Cook and his cameraman, who could do nothing but flash their eyes and wiggle their held-up arms, is a testament to how damn proud *Thunderbirds* was for being filmed in Supermarionation. Other episodes tested the boundaries of how far one could use miniatures and models as a vessel for legitimate, substantial and straight-faced entertainment. Did 'Attack of the Alligators!', with its liberal use of real-life crocodiles, show Anderson taking his desire to include some form of genuine life within his Supermarionation spectacles to a whole new level? He may not have written the episode, but one wonders if his frustration at the lack of genuine character emotion from *Thunderbirds* linked in with those terrific creatures.

A wealth of other episodes, spanning from the decidedly snail-ish 'The Mighty Atom', an episode that saw International Rescue absent for about a third of the story, the catastrophe-ridden 'Sun Probe', the spy-tastic 'The Man from MI.5', or the eerily real-world drama of automated technology gone wrong of 'Brink of Disaster', showed

us how *Thunderbirds* knew exactly how to take its audience on a rampant journey of adventure.

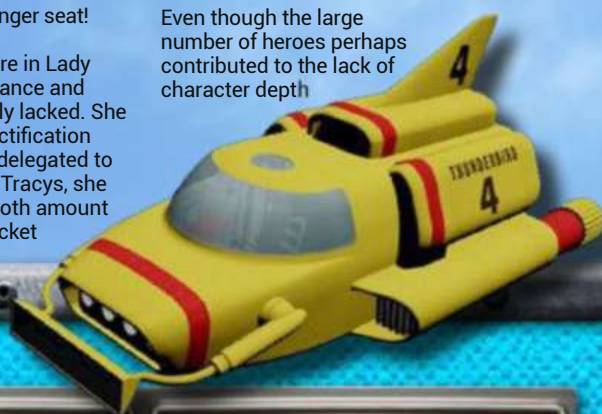
Arguably, though, some things haven't exactly stood the test of time. For a programme produced in the 1960's, it's inevitable that certain elements just haven't aged well, most noticeably the women. Poor old Tin-Tin boasted an array of degrees in mathematics and engineering, and yet she was rarely seen away from typing out Jeff's correspondences or pouring coffee for everyone. Similarly, feminist theorists can argue that Lady Penelope has it bad because she's the only character armed with a fantastically futuristic machine who doesn't actually pilot it. And when she did try to drive FAB 1 for the first time in 'Vault of Death', those theorists may well think she'd be better off back in the passenger seat!

But there's still plenty to admire in Lady Penelope, as she had the elegance and charm the Tracy boys so sorely lacked. She was neither a subject for objectification within the show, nor was she delegated to pouring the coffee. Unlike the Tracys, she didn't need to cause a mammoth amount of explosions in over-sized rocket

ships to get the job done. Before there was Ellen Ripley, Buffy Summers, Princess Leia, Scarlett Johansson's interpretation of Natasha Romanoff, or even *The Bride*, there was Lady Penelope, the heroine every girl wanted to be.

On the other side of this coin, you were spoilt for choice if you wanted to be a Thunderbird pilot. Before Brad Bird made our hearts melt with *The Incredibles*, *Thunderbirds* gave us a whole family of heroes to root for, evolving from the one-hero-per-series system seen in *Four Feather Falls*, *Supercar*, *Stingray*, and *Fireball XL5*. That multiple choice in heroes would continue somewhat into *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*, but just like how happy it was to be filmed using marionettes and models, *Thunderbirds* was as keen as mustard in letting you know this was to be an adventure with a whole host of square-jawed and finely-combed young men to gawp at.

Even though the large number of heroes perhaps contributed to the lack of character depth





for us to see, there's just enough balance between the characters for us to dive into their world and engage with them, and that leads into one final reason *Thunderbirds* continues to blasts us off into adventure – the equilibrium of the show itself. From the production values to the voice artists, the music to the models, everything about *Thunderbirds* fits so perfectly together, and that surely has to do with the absence of a wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am approach to the show's pacing.

As mentioned, *Thunderbirds'* crawling nature worked better in some episodes more than others, but overall you can't deny the rumbling, evocative atmosphere the show produced. Its slow, calm theme gave plenty of time and room for all its elements to fall into place, resulting in a television show that has such immense craft and grace to it, despite all those explosions!

But there are perhaps simpler reasons why we continue to fall in love with the exploits of International Rescue. Firstly, *Thunderbirds* is just such a fun show, plain and simple. With its swashbuckling heroes, incredible rescue vehicles and daring escapades, it has a simple enough premise to delight any potential newcomers to the show. Secondly, *Thunderbirds* embodies the 1960's attitude to entertainment better than its rivals.

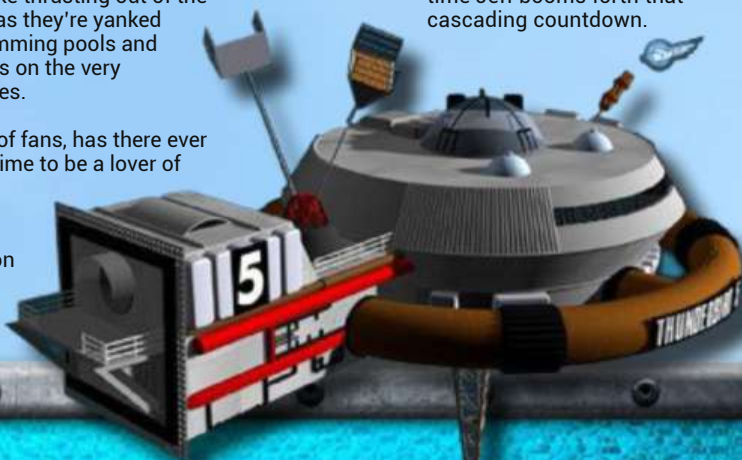
Fusing strands of *Star Trek*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Doctor Who*, and James Bond, this is a show that really does have something for anyone with taste.

Thirdly, there's something inside of us that loves to treat the show like some cult Hollywood legend. The very story of how *Thunderbirds* was born – "...this isn't a television series, this is a feature film!" – reads like some half-forgotten myth that only the fans know off the top of their heads. It gains a new level of romanticism as it's passed down from generation to generation. Not only do we gorge on the show itself, but we indulge ourselves in the fascinating history behind it. Tales of frustration in making the marionettes and models work have a crackling sense of vigour to them, as if you can almost smell the smoke thrusting out of the *Thunderbirds* as they're yanked out of the swimming pools and off the runways on the very thinnest of wires.

And speaking of fans, has there ever been a better time to be a lover of *Thunderbirds*? In the space of a few short years, Anderson Entertainment, led by Gerry's

son Jamie, have nearly drowned us in a sea of quality product – new *Terrahawks* adventures, the *Gemini Force One* books, and constant teasing of *Firestorm* (when oh when will we see that in its finished form?). Sylvia Anderson's *The Last Station* has reportedly shifted into the pilot episode phase, and the *Filmed in Supermarionation* team are keeping fans in suspense with their *Thunderbirds* 1965 project. Oh, and there's that half CGI/half model reboot thing that ITV must be making a fast buck out of as well!

It's safe to say that even half a century after their first emergency call, *Thunderbirds* will always come to our rescue, whatever the situation. Maybe that's the greatest reason why we still feel a tingle down our spines every time Jeff booms forth that cascading countdown.



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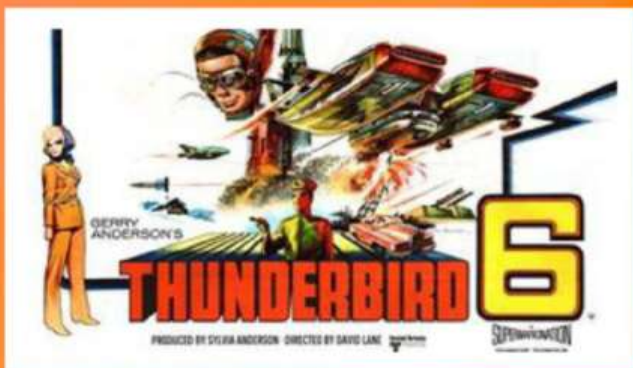


THUNDERBIRDS

On Film

By Scott Varnham

As part of our celebration of fifty years of THUNDERBIRDS, we look at the original big screen outings of the SUPERMARINATION creations...



Jonathan Frakes will be known in years to come for many good things, but making a good *Thunderbirds* film is not going to be one of them. Released in 2004, the commercial and critical flop was damned by Supermarination visionary Gerry Anderson, who claimed that *Team America: World Police* (released the same year) stuck more to the spirit of *Thunderbirds* than the *Spy Kids*-influenced production. But what happened back in the day when Anderson had more creative control? This feature will take you back through time and give you a look into the making of the two films of the '60s television series, *Thunderbirds Are Go* and *Thunderbird 6*, both of which have been recently re-released on Blu-ray should you want to watch them.

There is a story that Anderson loved to recount in his lifetime; when he first showed *Thunderbirds* pilot 'Trapped In The Sky' to Lew Grade, the wily executive pulled a bait-and-switch on him (mainly, we imagine, to screw with the filmmaker): "Gerry, this isn't a television show... this is a feature film!" This was accompanied by an edict to make each episode 50 minutes long rather than the established 25. Despite this ringing endorsement of Anderson's abilities as a creative force, it should've served as something of a warning sign; to bring each already-produced show up to 50 minutes, the writers had to frantically scramble to add extra scenes and subplots to the episodes. Our esteemed editor, Mike Royce, has described the show itself as (and we're paraphrasing here) 'mostly the same rescues week after week; Thunderbird 2 pops out a fancy pod vehicle while Thunderbird 1 holds up a bit of cable or something'. Watching them all back on DVD, it's hard to argue with him. This need for padding would show up again in both films.

If you've not caught the film on one of its numerous Bank Holiday or Sunday afternoon showings, *Thunderbirds Are Go* revolves around the plan to launch a ship which will land on Mars. The first launching of the Zero X craft doesn't quite go well, in quite a wince-worthy scene (for a puppet production) where perennial saboteur The Hood gets his foot caught in the hydraulics of the craft. The second outing is a lot more successful, leading to a memorable climax as the humans are attacked by strange rock snake monsters and the ship comes into trouble upon re-entering Earth's atmosphere.

But let's deal with the padding; the swinging singer-shaped elephant in the room. While writing the script in Portugal, Gerry and Sylvia Anderson ran into Cliff Richard and the Shadows, deciding there and then to put them into the film with a big musical number and giving them a job working on the film's score. The musical number is the centerpiece of a strange, strange dream sequence where Alan and Lady Penelope are flown into space by Parker in FAB 1 to visit the Swinging Star nightclub. Why Parker is driving a car into space when Alan is a qualified space pilot





is beyond us. It's possible that we're thinking too hard about it. In this scene, puppet versions of Cliff Richard Jr. (yes, Jr.) and the band sing Shooting Star on a large guitar-shaped stage. It's all very out of place and does nothing whatsoever to advance the plot.

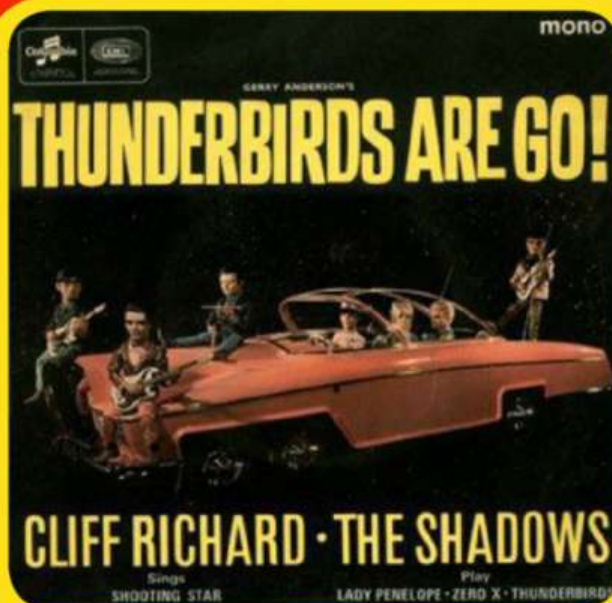
This could be because the plot had to stop out of necessity until the crew of the second Zero X flight got to Mars. After all, Scott Tracy had just foiled another sabotage attempt; this time it was the work of the devious and insidious - oh, it's the Hood again. Seemingly determined to bring some closure to that long-running threat, the writers had the villain chased down and eventually 'killed' by Parker.

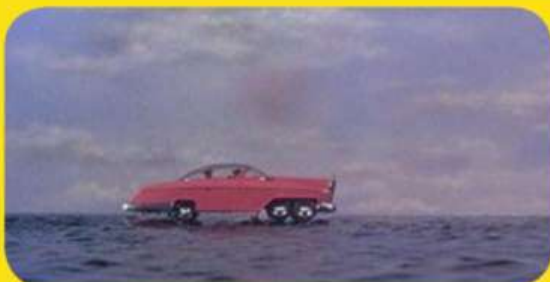
Though the model sequences were thrilling and reminiscent on occasion of the best episodes of the show, the film did not perform as well as anyone involved was hoping it would. The reviews were mixed, but cinemas were half full. Without some sort of mass mind-reading device and a time machine, we can only speculate why audiences stayed away from this big-screen outing. Some have theorised that it was because they didn't understand why they should go to the cinema to see a film of a television series that they get for free (perhaps explaining all those Bank Holiday and Sunday afternoon appearances). It could also have been because there was competition from other films at the time, or that the Tracy family (who the film was apparently about) barely featured in it. We prefer the theory that moviegoers saw the name 'Cliff Richard' in the credits and ran like hell, or perhaps people were scared off by the either charming or creepy sticker on the poster stating that "adults over 16 should be accompanied by children".

In the midst of all this came a devastating, horrific blow to the Andersons: they were getting another television series. Wait, no. We mean that they were getting paid quite a lot for their time and hard work creating television classics. Okay, let's start over. *Thunderbirds* had been cancelled beyond the dramatically shortened series of six new episodes. Joking aside, we're sure this did indeed come as a great shock to the husband and wife team, especially as the show was so beloved. However, this did free them up to work on their next series, *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*. As *Captain Scarlet* was set in the same universe as *Thunderbirds*, it was decided to use an incident from *Thunderbirds Are Go* to form the basis of the show's narrative. On a return voyage to Mars, Captain Black is aboard the Zero X when it attacks an alien city belonging to the initially inquisitive Mysterons, leading them to turn him into one of their deadliest agents.

But *Thunderbirds* wasn't finished yet. While the darker series was in production, the Tracy boys had one more outing to go on...

It says something about *Thunderbird 6* that the main 'joke' of the film was a play on something that most viewers today





won't remember. "Put a tiger in your tank" was an advertising slogan for Esso, and it's this that Virgil riffs on when the eponymous Thunderbird 6 is finally revealed. We had to look that up to understand the reference. That's how bad that decision was. And as we've already given the first film grief for padding, we can't give this a pass on the same charges. A great deal of the film is given over to a several week long trip by airship, to destinations that we hardly ever experience.

This wouldn't be a section about *Thunderbird 6* if we left out the most important part of the film: the unintentionally (we think) horrifying scene where Brains pitches Skyship One to the executives at New World Aircraft Corporation. They laugh at him through nightmarish faces, locked in one position while a camera zooms right into their mouths. It's what we imagine hell looks like.

But it's worth noting that, though the film like its predecessor gets a lot wrong, it does a lot of stuff quite well. The effects shots are amazing, especially the scenes where they were able to blend the model footage with footage of an actual Tiger Moth flying along an unfinished motorway. The Hood is also back (err... somehow; maybe he's working for the Mysterons. Don't ask questions, kids), this time as the Black Phantom. This time, the plan he comes up with is pretty good. It is admittedly hard to see how he expected a plan that was actually called 'Operation Ambush' to end well (as it inevitably did not), but it was only rumbled because the 'marks' were actually on the ball enough to stop him. The darker atmosphere of the film in general is also pretty noteworthy, with the cold-blooded murder of the original stewards shown in detail along with the callous disposal of their corpses.

By this point, it should come as a surprise to nobody that this film also failed to break box office records. It became clear that audiences just weren't interested in seeing a *Thunderbirds* film and the whole enterprise blinked out of existence for a while. But the appeal of a childhood love never quite died for many Anderson fans, ensuring many runs of the series throughout the 47 years since *Thunderbird 6*. And with the new *Thunderbirds Are Go!* series proving to be a big success on the small screen, how long will it be before the Tracy brothers make their glamorous return to the big screen in a film worthy of the franchise?

We have no idea, but there's a weekend coming up if you want to take an afternoon to put the Blu-ray boxset on and go back in time 40 years, back to when people thought there might be a Cliff Richard Jr., when plans could be called Operation Ambush and when you could still put a Tiger in your tank.

THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO! and *THUNDERBIRD 6* are available now on Blu-ray in the UK from Fabulous Films.



GOTHAM

YEAR TWO

by Andrew Pollard

To borrow from another comic book property, walk down the right back alley in Gotham City and you can find anything. Having impressed many with its debut run, FOX's **GOTHAM** is set to return for a second season this October, expanding its vast array of characters as it does so. Let's have a look ahead at what struggles lie ahead for Ben McKenzie's James Gordon and the few good men and women that he can truly trust in this world of scum and villainy...



Bruce Wayne

TEETHING PAINS

Right, to make this personal and to get it out there from the beginning: **Gotham** is a show that I really didn't think was for me. Whilst the majority here at Moonbase Alpha were on board with the show from the get-go, myself and 'the Ed' Mike Royce were concrete in our stance that this Batman-lite series was not one that we could stomach. Initially described as a Jim Gordon-focused series, we were hoping for a strong Gordon narrative similar to something like Frank Miller's **Batman: Year One**; itself a seminal Bat-book and one that made Gordon near-enough as important as the Caped Crusader. The problems with **Gotham** came as the series announced the addition of more and more Batman characters, including the young Dark Knight-in-waiting himself and variations of familiar names such as Catwoman, Penguin, Riddler, Two-Face, Poison Ivy, Victor Zsasz, Black Mask, Scarecrow, and even supposedly The Joker in there somewhere. The focus on Gordon looked like being lost as the show looked like morphing into **Gotham Babies** as Bat-references were shoehorned in from every angle.

Having watched the first three episodes of **Gotham**, I found it so-so at best; a show that struggled with its own identity and with what audience it was trying to reach. When the legendary Paul Mount took a brief break from his iconic **TV Zone** column, I was tasked with filling Mountie's unfillable shoes and so thought it only right and proper that I got

up to speed with **Gotham**, which by this point had churned out 15 or 16 episodes. But what's this? The show's actually rather good? Surely not? Well, knock me down with a Bat-shaped feather, for yes, **Gotham** had done the unthinkable and got me well and truly hooked on this show that the ardent Bat-fan in me was loathe to enjoy. The feeling of getting slapped in the face with many a Bat-tease had subsided, and in its place was a show that, whilst maybe working better as a straight-up cop show, had heart, was exquisitely crafted on so many levels, and that had a whole host of standout performances from its cast. Sure, **Gotham** may not have been exactly what we were promised, but it was a hugely enjoyable show that was ticking plenty of boxes.

YEAR ONE AND BEYOND

In terms of key plot points, the over-arching narrative of the first season saw the gang war between the Falcone and Maroni families, the ascension of Robin Lord Taylor's



Alfred Pennyworth



Jim Gordon

Penguin, Jim Gordon managing to find a few souls he could trust in the corrupt Gotham City Police Department, Edward Nygma reaching his breaking point, and also the first tiny footsteps of Bruce Wayne becoming the World's Greatest Detective. McKenzie held the show together impressively well as Gordon, although it was Lord Taylor's Oswald Cobblepot and David Zayas' Don Maroni who stole the show every time they were on screen, and then there was the ever-dependable Donal Logue doing a great job as fan favourite Harvey Bullock. It's just a shame that Maroni was offed by the time Season One came to a close, but there are still plenty of other dependable hands 'alive and kicking' to look forward to in Season Two.

Moving forward to the upcoming season, there are several key arcs to pick up on from the first season. The final

moments of Season One saw Bruce Wayne discover what appears to be the early stages of the Batcave, so it will be intriguing to see what direction that takes



Dr. Leslie Thompkins

young Master Wayne. It may be a little too much too soon for some fans of the show, and that's certainly understandable, but **Gotham** did a fantastic job of balancing the different facets of Bruce's character by the time the first season really started to get going. Then there's Penguin's mission to take over Gotham, with Cobblepot ascending the ranks and finally doing away with Jada Pinkett-Smith's Fish Mooney by the time Season One concluded. Penguin has a working relationship of sorts in place with Jim Gordon during the debut year that also throws up certain possibilities moving forward. And in a further continuation from the first season, Cory Michael Smith's Edward Nygma snapped at the end of Season One and will be back in a darker, more Riddler-like way this year. That said, we've still not really forgiven the show for *that* question mark mug in the early going, but the Nygma character actually felt like a natural fit working alongside the GCPD despite initial reservations. Then there's Jerome...

JOKER IN THE PACK

Before **Gotham** even premiered, the minds behind the show promised how there'd be several Joker teases throughout the first season before the young Clown Prince of Crime was finally revealed. Again, it *does* feel a little too contrived at times in how all of these characters *have* to be involved in the show and are often conveniently intertwined in their tales, but when Cameron Monaghan's Jerome turned up on the scene then he instantly won over most naysayers. Jerome hasn't been definitively confirmed to be the future Mr J, but Monaghan mesmerised when it was revealed how Jerome had killed his own mother, with the maniacal presence of the character being as close to The Joker as we've seen so far in the show. It also adds further fuel to the fire as Monaghan's Jerome is confirmed to be returning for Season Two. The actor has even taken to social media to reveal a lipstick-adorned picture of himself looking eerily similar to the Dark Knight's greatest foe, that the promos heavily feature Jerome in some very Joker-esque moments, and the fact that showrunner Bruno Heller has gone on record to say *"We're going to find out how the hell Jerome, the proto-Joker we met earlier in this season, connects with The Joker as people know him. That's the big focus of the beginning of the second season. We're going to tell the story of how The Joker came to be."* Make of that what you will. In other returning news, it's also worth noting that Morena Baccarin's Dr Leslie Thompkins has been bumped up to a series regular for Season Two, meaning we'll be seeing a lot more of Gordon's love interest in this new season, as has Nicholas D'Agosto's Harvey Dent, although we'd like to think his Two-Face days are still a fair way away at this point.

In terms of new additions, the one that instantly grabs the attention is Victor Fries, aka Mr Freeze. The ice-cold villain



Harvey Dent

Captain
Nathaniel Barnes

has been confirmed for Season Two, although no casting has been announced for the role as of going to print. Then there's also whether the show gives us a younger Fries or an older, seasoned version of the rogue. Either way, let's just hope that **Gotham's** Mr Freeze is more in tune with the one seen in **Batman: The Animated Series** rather than Das Arnold's dreadful, pun-laden turn in **Batman & Robin**. Another minor DC



Harvey Bullock



Selina Kyle



Oswald Cobblepot

addition is super strong villain Amygdala, who is also yet to be cast.

Equally as interesting is the addition of **The Shield's** (and *The Thing* from Tim Story's **Fantastic Four** movies) Michael Chiklis as GCPD Captain Nathaniel Barnes. The character is described as a hero and mentor to Jim Gordon who is initially a strong ally before at some point in the future becoming an even stronger enemy.

FAMILY AFFAIR

Keeping with the villain theme, **The Goldberg's** Dustin Ybarra has landed the intriguing role of Robert Green, officially described as "a homicidal cannibal locked up in Arkham Asylum for the Criminally Insane after he was found guilty of murdering and eating more than a dozen women." Here's hoping that character is more than just a villain-of-the-week sort, for there seems a lot of potential to do some truly disturbing stuff with that particular rogue. Some bad eggs who definitely *aren't* going to make just one appearance are brother/sister duo Theo and Tabitha Galavan. For comic book fans, Tabitha is to be the show's take on DC's Tigress. **True Blood** and **Agent Carter's** James Frain has been cast as Theo, whilst **Gracepoint's** Jessica Lucas will be playing Tigress. The official word on the siblings reads, "*Theo Galavan is the saviour the city has been waiting for... sexy, heroic and lovingly devoted to his sister Tabitha. But behind Galavan's altruism is a centuries-old vendetta. Galavan and Tabitha (aka Tigress) will take chaos and violence to a new level in order to bleed Gotham. Their plan will lead to the creation of new villains... and the destruction of others.*" Certainly sounds ominous, and then there's the speculation on just which new villains will be created and just how they will come to be. Additionally, Theo Galavan will be a character who Bruce Wayne looks up to as a father figure of sorts and his niece will also play a part in Season Two. Who's his niece, we hear you ask? Well, given that we're talking about **Gotham**, of course she has to be somebody from the Bat-books. That person is Silver St. Cloud, so often portrayed as a love-interest of the adult Bruce Wayne in the comic book realm. This younger version of Silver will be played by



Tabitha Galavan



Theo Galavan

Natalie Alyn Lind and will indeed pull on the heartstrings of the future Caped Crusader.

After a slightly slippery start, **Gotham** upped its game to become a massively enjoyable show by the time its first season came to an end. Here's hoping it can take its lead from another DC-based show, **Arrow**, and deliver something truly special for its second year. Sure, **Gotham's** got its problems, but somehow it manages to largely make most things work, which is an admirable trait in and of itself. At first it almost seemed as if the show was trying to run before it could walk, but the pacing then slowed down, the focus did indeed switch to Jim Gordon, and the corrupt gang-based world of crime was allowed to shine through, with the show all the better for it. There's plenty more to come from the series, with more power-driven crime as Penguin looks to seize control of the city, and then there's the development of current and new characters plus the intriguing situation surrounding a certain Clown Prince of Crime.

With **Gotham's** 22-episode second season set to return to US screens, we just need to convince the Ed to give the show another chance.

GOTHAM begins screening in the US on September 21st, with a UK date expected to follow.



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THE MARTIAN CHRONICLE

BY PAUL MOUNT



RIDLEY SCOTT and MATT DAMON take to the stars in the highly anticipated feature film adaptation of *THE MARTIAN*, Andy Weir's best-selling survivalist science fiction adventure. *STARBURST* whips out its telescope and looks forward to finding out if there really is life on Mars...

Considering that it's our closest celestial neighbour in the Solar System, earthly audiences have remained curiously resistant to the cinematic charms of the Red Planet (that's Mars to you) on the silver screen. Bargain bins across the world are littered with unloved and unwatched copies of movies such as *Mission to Mars*, *Ghosts of Mars*, *The Last Days on Mars* and, perhaps most catastrophically, 2011's *John Carter*. Disney, it appears, were so terrified of the Curse of the Crimson Planet that they cut 'of Mars' from *Carter*'s title, leading non-genre-savvy audiences to expect a film about an upmarket tailor or an estate agent - either of which, in retrospect, might have been preferable...

But, if the planets are correctly aligned, things might take a turn for the better for the fourth rock from the Sun following the release next month of legendary director Ridley Scott's latest sojourn into the world of science fiction. *The Martian*, like 2013's ground-breaking, multi-Oscar-winning *Gravity*, is another entry in a welcome new breed of sci-fi films that might more accurately be described as 'space adventure'. Like *Gravity*, *The Martian* does not concern itself with the ephemera and the clichés of the genre - there are no aliens, wormholes or time travel shenanigans here. This is a story about mankind pushing out amongst the stars and discovering that life out in the vacuum of space is fraught with danger and peril and that, wherever we may find ourselves, there's no place we crave more than home.

The Martian is an extraordinarily gripping and captivating tale of the

human spirit and of an indefatigable will to survive in the most hostile and unforgiving environment imaginable to man - the surface of another planet. Astronaut Mark Watney (Matt Damon) finds himself stranded on Mars - impaled by an antenna, lost in a ravine, his spacesuit's communications unit and life-signs monitor compromised - and presumed dead by his colleagues when the expedition is forced to abandon the Red Planet in the wake of a potentially lethal sandstorm. As the surviving astronauts try to come to terms with their loss on their long trip home and Mission Control in NASA counts the cost of a life lost on an alien world, Watney is alive and alone, cut off from his own planet with just a few months' supply of food, no reliable method of contacting NASA and with little or no hope of rescue. But Mark Watney is made of sterner stuff than your common-or-garden spaceman; he has his wit, his sense of humour and an unparalleled instinct for survival; even if he can contact Earth, a rescue mission will take four years to reach him. With his supplies dwindling, he has no choice but to cannibalise and recycle everything - yes, *everything* - if he's to stand even the slightest chance of avoiding starvation and living long enough to be rescued. Or, as he puts it rather more succinctly: "I'm going to have to science the shit out of this."

The Martian's journey to the silver screen is a story worth retelling in itself. Written in his spare time - and meticulously researched - by California-born computer programmer Andy Weir (a massive *Doctor Who* fan who admitted in an interview published in 2014 that his 'perfect day' would include 'dinner





with the *Doctor Who* writing team'), *The Martian* was initially received with indifference and disinterest by literary agents and publishers alike. Weir was left with little choice but to publish the novel episodically, a chapter at a time, on his own website. The story quickly picked up its own momentum and, at the request of his readers, Weir uploaded the completed work to Amazon's Kindle eBook service, competitively priced at just 99 cents, where it rapidly rose to the top of Amazon's sci-fi lists, selling upwards of 35,000 copies in just three months. Traditional publishers soon sat up and took notice - Weir signed a publishing deal and sold the film rights in the same week - and the book finally appeared in print courtesy of Random House in February 2014 and

by the following month, its hardback edition was topping the New York Times Best-Sellers science fiction list and the paperback edition has been a constant heavy hitter ever since it was released. *The Martian*, quite simply, is a modern publishing phenomenon...

Inevitably, especially in the wake of the smash success of Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity*, *The Martian* quickly attracted Hollywood's attention. 20th Century Fox, having nabbed the film rights, hired former Joss Whedon alumni Drew Goddard to both script and direct the movie version. Goddard's script went down a storm but the writer left the project shortly afterwards, dallying briefly with Netflix's *Daredevil* series before moving on to *The Sinister Six* and, more recently, the latest reboot of

Spider-Man courtesy of the new Sony/Marvel alliance. Fox, needing a safe pair of hands at the tiller of their promising new acquisition, brought Ridley Scott on board. Scott, of course, is no stranger to the genre, with *Alien*, *Blade Runner* and the less well-regarded *Prometheus* prominent on his CV. Matt Damon, one of the movie industry's last remaining proper leading men, was already on board to play the beleaguered Mark Watney; together Scott and Damon pored over Goddard's script but felt that he had almost effortlessly captured the spirit of Weir's novel and the scope of its adventure. *The Martian* entered production in Budapest in November 2014, before moving in March this year to southern Jordan, specifically the area known as 'the valley of the moon',



which provides a suitably barren, desolate and distinctly unearthly landscape that has not only appeared in classics such as *Lawrence of Arabia* but also, slightly worryingly, in one or two of the Mars-based Box Office bombs of the past.

Fans of the novel might remember that the meat of the story focuses on Mark's incredible battle to stay alive in impossible circumstances, reusing parts of his makeshift home (the expedition's temporary habitation unit) and eking out his meagre supplies whilst fashioning plans to make contact with NASA. But we also spend time back on Earth when the news breaks of Watney's survival and plight, and also with the expedition astronauts on their way back and the terrible decisions they have to make when it becomes apparent that they might hold the key to Mark's salvation in their hands. The film, out of necessity, expands these supporting locations and characters and the cast has swollen to accommodate the likes of Jessica Chastain, Kate Mara, Sebastian Stan and Michael Pena as the astronauts and, back at NASA, Jeff Daniels, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Sean Bean and Kristen Wiig at Mission Control feverishly working on ways to get Watney home.

Weir was keen for his original novel to not shy away from the scientific realities of its story; despite its preponderance of technical data, chemical formulae and often mind-bogglingly detailed facts and figures, the book is still a thrilling and engrossing page-turner, most of its science digestible and comprehensible and never presented to the detriment of the pace of the story itself. Fans of the novel will be relieved to hear that this particular baby hasn't been thrown out with the bathwater and Hollywood hasn't attempted to dumb down Weir's dense, detailed backstory. NASA has been on



hand during the filming (specifically their Jet Propulsion Labs) and the European Space Agency has been on set and it's clear from trailers released so far that the film, in realising key dramatic moments from the novel, has taken enormous pains to maintain the scientific integrity of the source material whilst simultaneously making it palatable and appealing to an audience who might usually prefer their science fiction with the emphasis firmly on the *fiction*.

As the heat of the summer blockbuster season fades and restless audiences gear up for a return to a Galaxy far, far away at the end of the year, the combination of the peerless Ridley Scott, the reliable and dependable - not to mention highly bankable - Matt Damon, an all-star supporting

cast, state-of-the-art special effects and a killer script based on one of the best-selling genre novels of the last decade, look set to guarantee a movie experience which will truly be out of this world. *The Martian* promises a science fiction film rooted in reality, a nail-biting edge-of-the-seat thriller catering for sophisticated and intelligent cinemagoers who demand more from their genre movies than pyrotechnics, giant aliens and grown men-in-tights. If nothing else, the film is sure to bring to an end the cinematic curse of the dead Red Planet in what looks set to be one of the most memorable and exciting movies of the year.



THE MARTIAN touches down in cinemas on September 30th.



DOES DARK MATTER?

BY ED FORTUNE



A CREW, A SPACESHIP, ADVENTURES IN SPACE - BOLDLY GOING WHERE OTHERS HAVE GONE BEFORE. SO WHY SHOULD YOU BE GETTING EXCITED ABOUT CANADA'S LATEST SCI-FI EXPORT? MEET THE CREW AND FIND OUT...

Even though science fiction fans tend to be a forward-thinking bunch of people, looking into the future to see what it brings, it doesn't mean that we don't like familiar things. Canadian TV drama *Dark Matter* (which has just finished airing on Syfy in the UK and is out on DVD in October) is a case in point. The idea of a bunch of roguish, rebellious bad-asses, roaming the galaxy and getting into all sorts of scrapes, is pretty much standard issue for a science fiction show. *Lexx*, *Blake's 7*, *Andromeda*, *Firefly*, etc. all use a similar set-up. Luckily, this just means that the show is in excellent company, and even better; it takes an old idea and gets on with doing something new.

Dark Matter begins with five people waking up out of stasis pods. So far, so *Alien*, but the twist here is that the characters themselves have utterly no idea who they are or how they've come to be there. What they do know is that (with one exception) every one of them has a

mean reputation and an extraordinary capacity and skill for mayhem and violence. Each protagonist is literally a blank slate. Given that they don't even know their own names, they also end up identifying themselves with the number on the pod. Which at the very least makes it easy to keep track of how many people are in this ensemble cast.

The show expands on each individual mystery over the course of the series, which is a neat narrative device. Because the protagonists have no idea who they are, it makes it much more compelling as we discover their back stories. Much of the series is about these people finding out not only who they are, but whether they still want to be those people.

Dark Matter began life as a script for a TV series which swiftly got turned into a graphic novel by Dark Horse Comics in 2012. The book, *Dark Matter: Rebirth*, bares more than a passing resemblance to the show. Not only is the plot pretty

much the same as that of the pilot, the artwork has clearly been used as a bit of a casting guide.

Because *Dark Matter* is composed of tropes, it's quite easy to explain the characters in terms of other popular science fiction heroes. One (played by Marc Bendavid) is meant to be our sympathetic, pretty-boy character. In terms of other shows, he's much like *Firefly*'s Simon Tam or Roj Blake from *Blake's 7*. Though not the leader, he is the voice of reason and compassion. He stops the series from simply being about a bunch of cut-throats and encourages the rest of the team to be true to their selves. It doesn't hurt that Bendavid is also a very attractive man with big soulful eyes. We predict he's going to get the most awkward romances throughout the show, because seeing a handsome space hero unable to find romance is always amusing.

Two, played by Broadway actress Melissa O'Neil, is the crew's default leader. She's the closest thing they have to someone like *Blake's 7*'s Avon, in the sense that she immediately takes control and uses intelligence and sarcasm as her primary weapons. She isn't anything like Mal from *Firefly* or your typical *Star Trek* captain;





she's way too hands-on to be the latter and too smart to be the former. So far, much of her screen time has been taken up by her actually being the leader; the show has yet to spend a lot of time just focusing on her backstory. This has the nice side effect of making her the most mysterious. Her story promises to be a slow burn and we suspect the payoff is going to be fab. Two on her own is almost a good enough reason to watch the show.

Anthony Lemke is a regular on the Syfy channel, and a highly regarded and talented actor. Which makes his casting as Three all the more interesting. Three is the show's surly combat wombat, the sort of chap who gives his weapons cute names, doesn't mind hurting innocent people and wants to get as much money as possible so he can spend it all on wine, women and song. It would be a little unfair to call him *Dark Matter's* version of Jayne from *Firefly*, simply because Lemke is a much better actor than Adam Baldwin and he creates a wonderfully nuanced thug. The characterisation lies somewhere between *Blake's 7's* Gan and *Stargate Atlantis'* Ronan, and though it's a cliché to say that you'll 'love to hate him', that's exactly what he's about. After all,

the thing about *Dark Matter* is that it's full of old clichés done very well.

Four is a different sort of trope; he's the show's ninja. For real. He's the chap who not only carries around two very sharp swords on a spaceship, but has enemies who seem daft enough to attack him in small groups (or even one on one). Not that we mind; we thought ninjas had all died out in the '80s. The world of *Dark Matter* has an entire sector of worlds that are inspired by feudal Japan, right down to the guards being dressed in a sci-fi version of samurai armour (though, of course, they carry guns). Actor Alex Mallari Jr. is best known for his action roles, and he pulls off the strong-but-silent Four brilliantly.

It wouldn't be a proper band of rogues without an innocent type to contrast against everyone else's dark and moody back story, and that's the job of Five. Jodelle Ferland (better known to *Twilight* movie fans as Bree Tanner) plays a whimsical, manic pixie dream girl type character who is also brilliant at computers. Despite being an unholy mix of *Firefly's* Kaylee and Wesley Crusher, Four brings a much needed lighter tone to a collection of mostly scary characters. Her story arc is also the most compelling, as being the youngest, the entire show is pretty much her backstory.

Whereas Four is all about the swords, Six is all about the fists. Former stunt man Roger Cross is used to playing bruisers (and has done so in many of Syfy's other shows) and his performance as the practical and stoic Six really suits him. He's the go-to character for a touch of pragmatic but warm advice, and also the gentleman most likely to break open doors and smash apart crates. He's the highly dangerous, highly competent one that you really get to like. We predict he's also going to have the stickiest story arc and the most tragedy, because that's what they do to protagonists you grow to like.

Finally, the comic relief is provided by The Android. In the comic book version, the robot was a big burly looking guy, but for the series they've cast award winning actress and comedian Zoie Palmer. Sinister and funny at the same time, she's exactly what you want from a robot. She plays the character as both eerily familiar and also intriguingly new at the same time. Which is also a really good description of this great new show.

DARK MATTER: Season One is released on DVD October 12th



BROTHERS IN ARMS

By Andrew Pollard

With **ARROW** and **THE FLASH**, The CW has created two shows that are huge favourites amongst genre fans. For all of the missteps so often associated with such shows, these shared universe efforts have bathed in adulation from critics and viewers alike, and have even managed to transcend the restrictions of genre TV and win over the hearts of those who usually wouldn't give such series a second look. Now both shows are on our horizon once more as they look to again wow audiences come their respective returns later on in the year. So, as is now tradition, let's look ahead at what you can expect from these DC-based heroes once they're back on your screens...



GETTING UP TO SPEED

Arrow is a show that has been championed by many, and the Stephen Amell-starring series is soon to return for its fourth season. After a wearing-in period, the Emerald Archer-centric show began to start hitting the correct beats in the second half of its debut year, before treating us to a truly stunning second season; a season which there's a very strong case to claim was the very best season of genre television in the last decade. A bold statement, yes, but just go back and watch it and you'll understand where we're coming from. Then came Season Three, which was impressive in itself if not quite hitting the dizzy heights of Season Two. But the game changed a little by the time Oliver Queen was sharpening his arrows ahead of a third year, for faster than you could say convenient-particle-accelerator-accident-creates-superfast-superhero-with-a-penchant-for-red came along a sister show in the form of **The Flash**. With Grant Gustin's Barry Allen having been introduced in **Arrow**'s Season Two, the character was tasked with his own solo show. Now whilst a Scarlet Speedster-focused show was always going to be a difficult one to master given the SFX-heavy action and larger-than-life characters, what was most impressive was how good **The Flash** was right from the get-go. **Arrow** had suffered initial teething problems before eventually finding its feet, but **The Flash**... well, **The Flash**, pun firmly intended, hit the ground running.

For his third year on our screens, Oliver Queen found himself leaning a little towards the dark side, having to essentially go rogue and infiltrate the League of Assassins in order to become Ra's al Ghul to defeat Ra's al Ghul. As for Barry Allen, he spent his debut year learning to understand his capabilities and desperately trying to solve the mystery of his mother's death. Both shows had great seasons, although in two very different ways. Sure, the Master Bowman and the Sultan of Speed inhabit the same world, but **Arrow** has been a far more brooding and dark show in comparison to the brighter and breezier **Flash**. Despite the status quo, **Arrow** did get to lighten things up a little by the time Season Three came to a close, with Oliver Queen literally driving off into the sunset with Emily Bett Rickards' Felicity Smoak in tow as he left the hero life behind. Flipping things over to Central City, and **The Flash** itself managed to have its darker, more intense moments, largely concentrated on the lies and deceit of Tom Cavanagh's Harrison Wells/Eobard Thawne/Reverse-Flash. By the time all was said and done though, **The Flash** had managed to just about save the day, although there's now a Multiverse in play and a further foreboding threat as Barry Allen's hero days have just gotten started.

DIGGLE



LADY COP



(GREEN) ARROW

Going with seniority, it's only right that we first focus our attention on what's ahead for Oliver Queen and Team Arrow when Season Four arrives later this year. Whilst there's some juicy details on villains and plotlines going forward, what's caught the eye most recently is that the titular hero of **Arrow** may very well be getting a name change that many long-time DC fans have been holding their breath for. Yes, we do indeed mean that Ollie looks as if he could be donning the Green Arrow moniker at some point in the near future. Ahead of the show's panel at July's San Diego Comic-Con came the release of the first promo art for Season Four, which just so happened to feature Oliver Queen in some snazzy new duds that look an awful lot like the recent comic book getup of Green Arrow. Then came star Stephen Amell actually wearing the new outfit as he took to the stage at Comic-Con, going on to read off a monologue (which could very well be used as the intro for Season Four) in which he refers to himself as the *Green Arrow*. Coincidence and purely fan service? We think not. After all, with The Arrow name apparently dying along with Roy Harper during Season Three, Oliver needs a new alter-ego if he's to stop Captain Lance from locking him up and exposing the whole Harper death as bogus. What better name to take on than the one that fans have been calling for since the show's debut? Adding further fuel to the fire is the fact that the first episode of this new season is titled **Green Arrow**.

With a slightly lighter tone promised for Season Four, seemingly taking a lead from **The Flash**, it's intriguing to see how the usually po-faced Oliver Queen will adapt to this new outlook. But fear not, for he'll be accompanied by plenty of heroes and villains, both familiar and new. Whereas Roy Harper is seemingly out of bounds now (whilst the character is still very much alive, actor Colton Haynes has wrapped up his time with **Arrow** in order to focus on movie projects), Felicity will indeed be back, as will David Ramsey's John Diggle. Many have hoped that Digg

will be revealed as being John Stewart Diggle, as in the Green Lantern character, and Ramsey himself has even talked up the idea previously, but that is seemingly not the direction that the character will be taking. He will, however, be getting himself a costume. Concept art shown at SDCC revealed that Digg will be getting an all-black ensemble that comes with a helmet, leading many to suggest that he could become the show's version of DC's Guardian, a comic book character who has ties to Roy Harper, 'Wildcat' Ted Grant, and The Atom – all characters who have appeared in **Arrow**. Similarly, Willa Holland's Thea Queen is getting an upgrade of sorts. Having become unhinged courtesy of a dip in one of Ra's al Ghul's Lazarus Pits, it may not be the wisest of moves to have Thea parading the rooftops of Starling City, but that is indeed going to be the case as the character will take on the Speedy moniker as she becomes a full-fledged member of Team Arrow. So basically, we're going to get a lot more of what we saw from the character during the Season Three finale. And then there's Katie Cassidy's Laurel Lance, who will continue to work on her Black Canary game. Laurel has been the most problematic character to date for the show, with her portrayal being so up and down and ill-conceived at times, so here's hoping that we get to see some vast improvements in Season Four for a character who is such an important one in the comic book lore of Green Arrow.

In terms of new additions, there's plenty. Most noteworthy of the bunch is Damien Darhk, who will serve as the big bad of Season Four. Having been referenced several times during Season Three, Darhk will step forward and butt heads with Oliver Queen throughout this upcoming season. Neal McDonough, who many may recognise as the MCU's Dum Dum Dugan, has landed the Damien Darhk gig, and the character will pull from his comic book roots, meaning we should expect a genius-level criminal with ties to the treacherous H.I.V.E. organisation. Fear not John Barrowman fans, for additionally, Malcolm Merlyn is sure to appear at some point down the line,

especially as he's now taken over the Ra's al Ghul mantle after how things played out in Season Three.

Again pulling from the comic book realm, **Arrow** has also added Mr. Terrific, Lady Cop, Anarky and Baron Blitzkrieg to its ranks. Rather than the comic book Michael Holt, this version of Mr. Terrific will be known as Curtis Holt and will be played by Echo Kellum as an openly gay Parker Technologies employee who is basically really good at near-enough everything and has his T-Spheres to help him out. Where Lady Cop is concerned, flipping her comic book roots as a hero on its head, **True Blood**'s Rutina Wesley's take on Liza Warner will see the badass, expert rozzar as part of Star City Police Department's anti-vigilante team – and yes, the change from *Starling City* to *Star City* is imminent. As for Anarky, he's usually portrayed as a low-level Batman villain who has a penchant for uprising and revolution. Here he'll again be a minor threat, but his character seems to have been slightly tweaked, with **Arrow**'s spin on the character making him a freelance criminal for hire who has ties to Darhk. **Bates Motel**'s Alexander Calvert will be playing Lonnie Machin, aka Anarky. Where Baron Blitzkrieg's concerned, the show's take on the villain will see him known as Baron Reiter, which falls in line with the character's comic book alias. **Holby City**'s Jimmy Akingbola has landed the role, which has been confirmed to be recurring throughout this upcoming season. Comic book-wise, the Baron is a crazed Nazi (aren't they all?) with super strength, heat vision and the ability to fly. In the show, he'll seemingly leave the Nazi ideology alone, instead being portrayed as a member of Shadowspire, an organisation often tied to Deathstroke in the comic book world. Additionally, **Falling Skies**' Ryan Robbins has landed the recurring role of Conklin, a "sadistic and ruthless member of Shadowspire." Those with ties to Shadowspire will spend their time tormenting Oliver Queen during the show's flashback moments, and Elysia Rotaru will also be playing a love interest of Ollie's during those same flashbacks.

DAMIEN DARHK



MALCOM MERLIN



STAR CITY



ANARKY



BARON REITER



MR TERRIFIC



FLASH FORWARD

After such a wondrous first year, the Grant Gustin-starring **Flash** certainly has a lot to live up to. Never a show to play it safe or walk on eggshells though, the series is upping the ante with Season Two as it looks to explore the Multiverse. For those not familiar with the Multiverse concept, it basically means we get to experience different timelines and even time travel. Quite the big task for young Barry Allen, but one we're sure the Scarlet Speedster is up. Then there's the subject of *other* speedsters.

Much like **Arrow**, there's plenty to look forward to with **The Flash**, so let's get right to it. Firstly, like Oliver Queen, Barry Allen will be getting himself a costume upgrade when the new season rolls around; pulling from the 'future' Flash that we've already seen in the show, the present Barry will see the background of his Flash logo changed up to white. Then there's that aforementioned subject of *other* speedsters. Having been teased by his helmet (easy now) in the Season One finale, we will indeed be getting Jay Garrick in Season Two. If you're not familiar with Garrick, he's the original *Golden Age* Flash, and in the show he'll be played by **Masters of Sex's** Teddy Sears. Officially described as a "mysterious figure who arrives in Central City to warn Barry Allen and his team at S.T.A.R. Labs of an impending danger that he alone cannot hope to stop", it'll be interesting to see just how long Jay sticks around for, or if his arc will span just a few episodes. What we do know is that he'll have ventured over to Central City from Earth-2. Then there's the mystery of "impending danger" that is on the way for Barry et al. That's where our next new addition comes in to play.

Whereas in Jay Garrick (and possibly Wally West, depending on how he's utilised) we'll be getting another Flash, there's also another villainous speedster set to make a splash in Season Two of **The Flash**. That speedster is Zoom. In the comic book world, Hunter Zolomon is a Central City police officer who gets his

powers courtesy of a meeting with Barry Allen, leading to him becoming known as Zoom. Now whilst the majority of other speedsters get their speed from the ability to move ridiculously fast, Zolomon is a little different; he is able to generate superspeed because he can actually manipulate the speed that he travels through time, which makes him faster than near-enough all other speedsters, including Barry Allen, Jay Garrick and Wally West. No casting has been made for Zoom at this stage, although there could still be a twist in the tale that maybe sees Rick Cosnett's apparently deceased Eddie Thawne factored in as Zoom. There's been talk of Cosnett returning to **The Flash** at some point, and the Eddie character is indeed a cop who ended up tied in to the Scarlet Speedster's goings-on. The notion of Eddie Thawne as Zoom is merely speculation at this point, and it seems like maybe too much of a stretch for the show. Another rumour is that Zoom could even be a disillusioned future version of Barry Allen who travels back in time to kill his younger self. What we do know is that the Candyman himself, Tony Todd, has been cast to voice Zoom in a move that has been compared to James Earl Jones voicing Darth Vader. Todd will merely be providing the speech for this highly powerful rogue as the mystery of who Zoom really is plays out over the entirety of the new season.

In another villainous new addition, former WWE World Champion Adam 'Edge' Copeland has been cast as Atom-Smasher, a super-powerful rogue who will turn up in the first episode of **The Flash's** Season Two, interrupting a Flash Appreciation Day of sorts. It's worth noting that Atom-Smasher is usually depicted as a hero and that Michael Rothstein, the character's real name, was somebody mentioned as one of those who died after the particle accelerator accident that gave Barry Allen his powers. Could this mean that this version of Atom-Smasher has followed Jay Garrick over from Earth-2? It could just be. Also turning up in the first episode of the new season will be the returning twosome of Robbie Amell's Ronnie Raymond and Victor Garber's Martin Stein, better known

as the combined hero Firestorm, meaning that Barry may get some assistance in taking down his new foe.

Keeping things in the family, Season Two will introduce us to Lewis Snart, the father of Wentworth Miller's Captain Cold and Peyton List's Golden Glider. To be played by Michael Ironside, himself no stranger to the DC world having portrayed Lois Lane's father in **Smallville** and lent his voice to various DC animated works, the head of the Snart clan will also be full of bad intentions as he looks to stamp his mark on Central City. Of a far less sinister nature is the addition of Patty Spivot, a new love interest for Barry Allen and somebody who just so happens to have an obsession with meta-humans and a certain Scarlet Speedster. **The Messenger's** Shantel VanSanten has landed the role, with Patty set to be the new partner of Jesse L. Martin's Detective Joe West. And on the West front, there has been confirmation that Wally West, another incarnation of The Flash, is set to arrive on the show at some point before Season Two comes to a close. Other still-to-be-cast roles include familiar DC rogues Mirror Master and Dr Alchemy, who are set to appear to cause further troubles for Barry Allen.

Whilst **The Flash** has plenty of new faces to get introduced to, there will also be the return of some familiar faces to keep Barry company. Basically, anybody that didn't bite the bullet by the end of Season One is going to be back, but it's with the trio of Cisco Ramon, Caitlin Snow and Harrison Wells that interest is most high. Having been revealed to have powers that allow him to vibrate through timelines in the Season One finale, Carlos Valdes' Cisco is set to move further towards the Vibe persona that his comic book iteration takes on. As for Danielle Panabaker's Caitlin, last season's finale gave viewers a blink-and-you'll-miss-it glimpse at Ms Snow as her villainous alter-ego Killer Frost. That, of course, was from another timeline, but there's certainly the option to take the standard timeline Caitlin down that path should the show so choose. After all, she's already been confirmed to be hesitant to return to S.T.A.R. Labs as she questions her role in life. And then there's the matter of the excellent Tom Cavanagh as Harrison Wells, a character revealed to be Eobard Thawne, the Man in the Yellow Suit who was responsible for the death of Nora Allen. Seemingly ceasing to exist by the time that Season One concluded, there may still be some life left in the legs of Harrison Wells. We'll leave that matter there for now, but it would be criminal not to find a way to bring back the fantastic Cavanagh in some way, be it as the pre-Thawne-fused Wells or some spin on Thawne being alive and well.

JAY GARRICK



DR ALCHEMY

FURTHER AFIELD

As you can see, there promises to be a whole lot of ups and downs ahead for both **Arrow** and **The Flash**, with the shows' shared universe expanding by the day. We've already seen mention of the likes of Blüdhaven and Coast City, and it only further stirred the pot when Stephen Amell teased the inclusion of Hal Jordan at some point in the possible near-future. Then there's DC's **Legends of Tomorrow**, a third show that will exist in this CW/DC world. Taking current characters – Brandon Routh's Atom, Victor Garber's Martin Stein, Wentworth Miller's Captain Cold, Dominic Purcell's Heat Wave – mixing them with new characters – Arthur Darvill's Rip Hunter, Franz Drameh's Jay Jackson (believed to be a take on either Static Shock, Black Lightning or Cyborg), Ciara Renee's Hawkgirl (briefly glimpsed,

sans wings, in **The Flash**'s Season One finale) – and even, in the case of Caity Lotz's Sara Lance, bringing them back from the dead (she'll be taking on the *White Canary* role, by the way), **Legends of Tomorrow** could itself lead to further new shows down the line for certain characters once they've battled with time-travelling, uber-powerful Vandal Savage. That particular show isn't arriving until early next year, though.

At present, UK return dates have yet to be confirmed for THE FLASH and ARROW, although the US schedule has Barry Allen racing back to screens on October 6th, with Oliver Queen's (Green) Arrow returning on October 7th. As is ever the case with these shows, it's expected that UK screenings will follow merely weeks after their US bows, in which case expect to revisit your favourite small screen heroes hopefully by the time October is through.



PATTY SPIVOT



ZOOM?



ATOM SMASHER



LEWIS SNART



WALLY WEST



MIRROR MASTER



HOT FUZZ

WORDS: MARTIN UNSWORTH

Over the past few years, POLLYANNA MCINTOSH has proven herself repeatedly as one of cinema's most versatile modern actors. In **LET US PREY**, hitting DVD in October, she appears opposite **GAME OF THRONES** star LIAM CUNNINGHAM...



STARBURST: Could you tell us a little bit about *Let Us Prey*?

Pollyanna McIntosh: It's about a rookie cop called Rachel; it's her first night on the job and she's left alone with the criminals in the cells, and a dark and mysterious stranger is in their midst. He seems to have some sort of controlling element over them, and everybody's dark secrets are revealed; kind of like being in purgatory. Without giving too much away, shit kicks off pretty hard! The shoot was mad! It was a typical independent film, but luckily we had a great team, great cast and a great director. We all got through it unharmed despite a lot of fire and stunts and manic activity! It was shot in Roger Corman's old studio in Spiddal by Galway, so we had this beautiful, serene setting: beaches and wild horses and all the Irish loveliness and we were just setting fire to everything.

So your character's more of a hero type this time?

Someone described her as the most normal person I've ever played, and considering she's a woman who disappeared as a child and was abused by a paedophile and then has to tangle with the devil, what does that say about the roles I've played?

You do seem to gravitate towards the riskier and edgier roles, is that something you're happy with?

Definitely! I can't imagine any actor who didn't think they gravitate towards the more complex roles. Unfortunately, they aren't all written so well. They aren't always out there, especially for women. Long may it continue!

In *White Settlers*, a film you did last year that has just been released in the States as *The Blood Lands*, you play Sarah, another strong character. Despite her early, completely natural, fears, she's very much the stronger half of the couple. How was that shoot for you?

It was a lot of fun; it was a pleasure to shoot - despite bruises, dirt and cold, wet night shoots. I think it was more stunts than I've ever done before, and that really got me going 'I wanna do more of this, more action-packed stuff'. Sarah's a funny one, because she's actually quite manipulative and needy. At the beginning, you see the power play between the couple and I thought that was really interesting. I played with that quite a bit, and like you say, she ends up being the provider, the fighter out of the two. Luckily, I had a great partner in Lee Williams playing my husband; he was willing to go the other way to show his vulnerability, so we had a good balance



there. And yet he still holds up his end, especially at the beginning with the little fights we have and stuff.

As a 'yes' voter in the Scottish Independence referendum, what was your take on the furore that was levelled at the film?

It was hilarious! I thought it was kind of silly, to be honest. But I also respect publicity stunts that work and that really did. The only angry tweet I've ever had from anyone was from a yes voter saying, 'How dare you use the referendum for your own self-publicising ways!' I quite enjoyed it, I got into it. I know you're not supposed to, but I'd say, 'Excuse me! I'm sorry I didn't know I wasn't allowed to reference the referendum for my own country in any way I please.' So yeah, I thought it was a bit odd really, but I understand why it was done and it worked. They got it in The Guardian, in The Scotsman; it got people aware that it was around. For me, it was more about the haves and the have-nots than it was about the English and the Scots. The bad guys in that movie to me are the banks; you just don't have bankers running around in pig masks!

Being Scottish, was there any time that you wanted to say, 'Wait... hold on...'?

No actually, Ian Fenton, the writer, is Scottish and he'd written a really tight script. I liked the questioning, ambiguous elements to the script and I think a lot of people enjoyed that in the ending, for instance. There were moments when I seem to remember myself saying, 'Oh you can't do that because that will make them seem like good guys too much!' I didn't want it to look like it was the bad guys we were supposed to root for, because despite them being the victims of the system, they can't be made into heroes, considering what they do to the couple. But it was finely balanced

in the end, I thought. As a Scot, the only thing that was particularly weird was once again playing an English person.

You're also in a new short, *The Herd*, directed by Melanie Light, which is billed as a 'feminist vegan horror'. It's likely that it'll open up the eyes of quite a few people when it comes to their dietary choices. What can you tell us about that shoot?

It was great! It was a really professional team; a really passionate team. Doing shorts is always great because you're always working with people who really believe in the project. There was a great cast. But the character was so grotesque for me to play, I felt quite sad playing her. I wasn't disappointed when I got to leave her behind.

You're the bad guy rather than the victim; would you have preferred it the other way around?

No, I think it was well cast, I think I was much better in that role than I would have been in the other roles. I really just wanted to facilitate Melanie in making this film, and hopefully I've helped in some way. I just thought the story was really epic and needed to be told. I loved the themes and I loved how angry the film is.

You'd worked with Melanie before though, right?

Yeah, I worked with her on the Women in Horror calendar, and she was a set designer on *Him Indoors*. She's brilliant at what she does, and I was just excited that she was going to be making her own movie. She'd done a couple of other shorts that were really great. She was a force to be reckoned with; she was just so excited, passionate and ready to rock n' roll all the time.

How do you get yourself into the mind-set of the hard, nasty roles?

With *The Herd* - like any character - you put yourself in the psychological place of that person. You can't set out to play a bad

guy thinking you're bad, because it doesn't work. And with her, she had a job to do and her livelihood depended on it. Yes, there were other things she could have done, but in the position she was in, the only way to protect herself from what was going on was to completely mute any feelings of wrongdoings from her actions. That was the hardest thing about playing that role. You feel the strain of that lie all the time; it was really uncomfortable. I felt very sad for the women I was holding, and on a bigger scale, for what people endure the world over. I know *how* I do it, but I don't know why!

On a plus side, you could have a career in politics!

Oh yeah, I definitely could! [laughs]

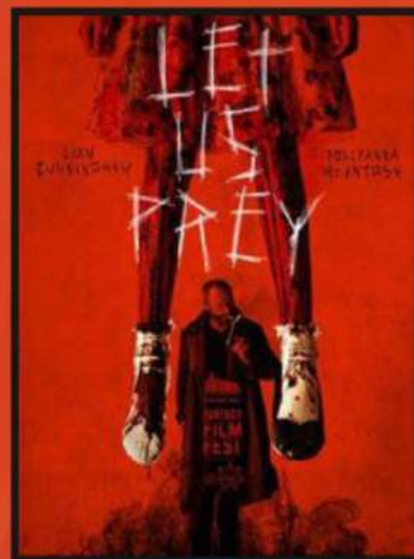
LET US PREY is released on DVD on October 5th. *THE HERD* has had several successful festival screenings, and *THE BLOOD LANDS* (aka *WHITE SETTLERS*) is out now in the UK and US.



WHITE SETTLERS



THE HERD



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SNEAK PEAK

BY JACK BOTTOMLEY



There are certain directors in the world of cinema, whose movies are not so much something to see, as they are an experience. Names like Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg are commonly cited as examples, as are other modern day big name filmmakers such as David Fincher, Christopher Nolan, Quentin Tarantino and Paul Thomas Anderson. Obviously, there is a strong debate as to who should be worthy of being included in such a list of outstanding talents but one name that requires no deliberation is Guillermo del Toro. Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, del Toro's international roots and cult body of visionary work has come to amass a feverish following the world over, with his becoming a name that guarantees quality.

Creating rich, subtext-filled, horrors (*The Devil's Backbone*) and astonishing fantasies (*Pans Labyrinth*), del Toro's films are a joyous beacon of imagination and passion in an ever growing crowd of paint-by-numbers sequels and remakes.

One of the most exciting directors of recent years is back with a gloriously Gothic tale, but what can we expect from GUILLERMO DEL TORO's CRIMSON PEAK...



Working as a writer (*The Hobbit Trilogy*) and producer (*Mama*, *The Orphanage*, *Julia's Eyes*) on varied and exciting films, his best work is undeniably behind the camera. Often tipping his hat to the genres, styles, artistic movements and real world politics that have come to impact his life, del Toro's cinema is among the most consistent of any working director today. Even his lesser considered work - 1997's *Mimic* for instance - offer some dark delights. So, after conquering comic book (*Hellboy II: The Golden Army*), kaiju (*Pacific Rim*) and fantasy cinema, del Toro goes back to the realm of Gothic horror with *Crimson Peak*. So light the bedside candle and read on, as we open the doors and go on a guided tour of this upcoming tale of romance, mystery and fear.

Starting life way back in 2006, del Toro and Matthew Robbins (*Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*) penned the script for *Crimson Peak*, which was secretly snapped up by a big wig at Universal. Sadly,

working with Hobbits and Hellboys takes some considerable time out of a guy's schedule, so the project was postponed. As time moved along, other directors were considered to run with the story, but none had the approval of del Toro. And so *Crimson Peak* waited in the shadows, ready to creep into the (green) light; that moment would eventually arrive in 2013. After developing a good relationship with Legendary Pictures (they clearly were drift compatible) during the making of his bots n' beasts blockbuster *Pacific Rim*, del Toro sent in a selection of drafts for his next feature. *Crimson Peak* was chosen over del Toro's ideas for an adaptation of H. P. Lovecraft's *At The Mountains of Madness* and a westernised twist on Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*. So the stage was set; Universal and Legendary were aboard for what promised to be a throwback to an altogether different age in horror cinema.

Winding corridors, blood-soaked

snow and nefarious apparitions evoke a resurrection of the motifs of '60s ghost stories, just as the multi-coloured psychedelic poster for the film conjures up memories of Italian giallo (in fact, the whole film was intended to be visually comparable to the work of Mario Bava). *Crimson Peak* may be an original tale but it is one proudly indebted to the likes of *The Innocents*, with aesthetic cues from films like *The Shining*. This is not a B-movie splatter fest, nor a gritty jump-scare thrill ride; this is a big screen horror that taps the vein of vintage period-based and set-driven haunted pictures. The film aims to update the narrative concept but at the same time take rigorous influence from the movies that make up the sophisticated 1960-80s age of horror cinema (*The Exorcist*, *The Haunting*, the best of Hammer). The director's intention is, in his own words, to create a 'classical, but at the same time modern, take on the ghost story'.

Set in the 19th Century among the rural



and elusive landscape of Cumbria, Northern England, *Crimson Peak* focuses on young author Edith Cushing (*Alice in Wonderland*'s Mia Wasikowska). The young lady falls for Sir Thomas Sharpe (that debonair god of mischief Tom Hiddleston - who was said to be terrified on first reading of the script); the two promptly wed and move into his old mansion home. However, all is far from well with this overpowering place and worse still, Sharpe and his sister Lady Lucille (Jessica Chastain) might just know more than they are letting on. The fog of mystery envelops this tale of love and the supernatural and what is already clear is that *Crimson Peak* is a gorgeously assembled picture. Filmed in Canada, with the snaking hallways of the mansion and the elusive rooms of the home all having been actually constructed (the house itself - ornaments and all - was all actually purpose built), there is little wonder that del Toro has called this the best set he has ever worked on. The minimal CGI, coupled

with the stylish Technicolor giallo visuals, creates a set-heavy feature that ought to allow Dan Laustsen's cinematography to be a character in itself.

In the journey to the big screen, *Crimson Peak*, at one point called *Haunted Peak*, has undergone many transformations (about 11 in fact), with del Toro thinking up brand new scenes during the shoot and at one point bringing in British playwright Lucinda Coxon to aid with the script's intricacies. Though it was originally set to star Benedict Cumberbatch and Emma Stone in the lead roles, both left the project and were promptly replaced (a mere 72 hours later in Hiddleston's case) by del Toro's second choices Hiddleston and Wasikowska. Charlie Hunnam (*Pacific Rim*) and Jim Beaver (*Deadwood*) also star alongside the main trio of big names, with smaller appearances from Burn Gorman (*The Dark Knight Rises*) and regular del Toro collaborator Doug Jones (*Hellboy*, *Pan's*

Labyrinth). *Crimson Peak* is as eloquently cast as it is constructed and with a score from international award nominated composer Fernando Velázquez (*The Orphanage*, *Babycall*, *The Impossible*), the music is set to be as engrossing and atmospheric as the visuals. Details are light on the characters; in fact, more is known about their immaculate period wardrobe than the characters themselves! However, that is surely the best way to go into a film that promises to pull us back kicking and (most importantly) screaming into the dark grounds of psychological and stylish haunted house horror films.

Recently watched by author Stephen King, who called the film "*gorgeous and just fucking terrifying*" (King sure doesn't bugger about when it comes to giving his views on something, does he?), *Crimson Peak* has all the potential to be one of the most unpredictable, well made and exciting films of 2015. Obviously, we will all have to wait and see what mysteries lay within



its blood-soaked staircases and cobweb-covered bookcases, but from what we have seen so far, it seems that the results will linger long after the end credits. The trailers have taken us on a picturesque tour of the sets and characters, drip-feeding the baying audiences striking images of escalating menace and colourful violence caught in a whirlwind of passionate desire. The best tales (and often some of the worst ones – yeah, mainstream rom-coms, we see you over there!) often spiral in some way from human connection and it seems that this film is going to be another example of this. So leave those bedside candles lit and prepare for a return to the horror dramas of old. 'Beware of *Crimson Peak*' an echoing and chilling voice warns us at the climax of the trailer - something tells us we should heed this warning...



CRIMSON PEAK unlocks its gates and throws open its creaking doors on October 16th.





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"LITTLE PIG, LITTLE PIG, LET ME IN"

BY ANDREW POLLARD



While Season Four may have dragged at times, Season Five was more of a return to form for AMC's uber-popular **THE WALKING DEAD**. By the time the season had come to a close, we'd been swiftly kicked in the nuts as the show was refreshed ahead of the further potential pitfalls that lie in wait for Rick Grimes and Co. So let's get reacquainted with the beaten down, desolate surroundings and look towards what's shuffling in the distance for this most successful of genre shows...

CREEPING UP TO SPEED

Now critics and awards ceremonies may have gushed like an overly-excited John Holmes when it came to acknowledging Season Five, but what actually happened to our beloved and battered crew to warrant such praise? Well, to be as brief as brief can be... the much-heralded safe haven of Terminus turned out to not be all that safe when cannibalism came a-calling. From there came an escape, with refuge found in a church (which served to introduce comic book fave Father Gabriel, played by Seth Gilliam) before a more established home was set up in the idyllic surroundings of Alexandria. In between all of that, it was revealed that Eugene and his mullet had been spouting a complete load of bollocks when it came to him having a cure, quickly curtailing the apparent mission to Washington, D.C. to save the world. With its secure locale and a community that seemed like a far saner version of The Governor's Woodbury, Alexandria was the perfect place for Andrew Lincoln's Rick and his team to call home. There was a house each, there were jobs, there was a sense of community, there was even the chance for Rick to shave off his hobo beard and make goo-goo eyes at some fine female sort. Clearly the memories of poor Lori and her impactful death were washed away with Rick's facial fluff. But, of course, all could not be roses and rainbows in Alexandria, meaning tensions built amongst certain groups, Rick (again!) went a bit mental before coming to his senses in order to then go a tad crazy yet again to kill the object of his affection's husband, and then





the rarely-seen Morgan appeared just in time to join the season's wrap party. Oh, and there were some utter, utter bastards out in the wilderness carving Ws on to the heads of folk - both dead and alive. Also, as ever, familiar faces fell by the wayside and new additions came into the fold (although some didn't last all that long).

While there were no deaths that quite hit the heights of "Look at the flowers", losing Emily Kinney's Beth was a massive hit for the show's core group of characters. The demise of Bob Stookey was also one that comic book fans remember fondly, with his decline being a spin of the famed "tainted meat" twist that featured Dale in the funny books. Then there was the death of Tyreese, which was the centrepiece of one of the series' most unique episodes, as we were given a front row seat on Tyreese's fateful journey from life to death after a walker bite. Other than that, the majority of the Season Five deaths were of minor, minor characters or those who'd not really been around long enough for you to build up any attachment to. That said, the bloody dismantling of poor Noah

made for one of the most gruesome and hard-hitting deaths that we've seen throughout the series as a whole.

THE JOYS OF SIX

Right, so that should have you roughly up to speed, which leaves us to gear our attention forward and to what lies ahead in this sixth season of *The Walking Dead*. First up, let's get the good stuff out of the way. Our familiar crew of survivors, some of whom we've been with for five years now, are finally in a surrounding that is actually safe, clean and with no crazed, eye-patch wearing sort in charge. Alexandria really is as close to bliss as *The Walking Dead* is ever likely to get. For now, at least. Each member of the community has a purpose, has a job, and has a sense of calm at having been happily isolated from the terrors that rumble on outside of the community's walls. Despite going bat-shit crazy again during Season Five (even losing the plot so badly that Michonne had to knock him out), the leader of Alexandria, Tovah Feldshuh's Deanna, saw it fit to follow Rick's lead and put him in charge as Season Five's finale came to a close.

One of the big problems of this is, as seen dotted throughout some of the previous seasons, sometimes Rick needs some help from others in order to be Rick Grimes. Sure, he's a leader and a man of strong convictions and rousing speeches (even if he does *still* put too many Rs in Carrrrrrrrrrl), but quite often he's been known to get lost up in his own world and to lose track of the greater picture as his emotions get the better of him. It's at these points that someone along the lines of Michonne, Carol, Glenn, Maggie or even Daryl have had to step in to bring Rick to his senses and open his eyes to the bigger prize and to the order of the day.

But then again, we're at a point in the show's axis where those aforementioned characters are capable of standing up on their own and making the bold calls that they'd previously rely on Rick for, meaning a slight shifting in the dynamic of *The Walking Dead*'s key faces. And on the topic of key faces, it still remains to be seen what role Lennie James' Morgan has to play in Season Six. When we last saw him properly, during an episode of Season Four, he was a blubbling, insane mess. He then turned





up in the fifth season finale, all calm, collected and having been through some apparent changes, not least reflected in his badass Donatello-esque bo staff skills. As such, we're sure to learn more of Morgan's journey as Season Six progresses, and it looks as though he's going to be a regular at least for the near-future. More interestingly, the footage we've seen to date indicates that Morgan is going to be at odds with Rick over certain things.

"I'M ON THE HUNT, I'M AFTER YOU..."

Yes, for those of you with a penchant for white suits, yachts and coiffed hair, that is indeed a Duran Duran reference, for that ties in nicely with the imminent villains of this new season: The Wolves.

Now, the minds behind the show are yet to confirm just exactly who The Wolves are, although all indications seem to have them pinned as the series' take on The Scavengers group from the comics. In the comics, Derek and his Scavengers group launch an assault on Alexandria after the commotion caused by the comic book equivalent of Season Five's finale grabs their attention. From



there comes an all-out battle between the two groups, with several casualties being amassed on both sides. This kick-off itself then leads to a gargantuan amount of walkers turning up to see what all the fuss is about and remove if there are any free eats on offer. Here's hoping we get some similar carnage and action on the TV show.

As well as *The Wolves*, it's also been confirmed that *another* unconfirmed group of no-good sorts will make an appearance during the latter parts of Season Six, with many presuming that this could very well finally be the arrival of Negan, The Savivors and, of course, Negan's ominous barbed wire covered baseball bat, Lucille. Let's just say if Negan *does* turn up in this next season, we could get one of the show's biggest moments to date. We're not saying any more on that front for fear of spoilers, but those who've read *Walking Dead* #100 will know what we're on about.

For those well versed in the comic book series, there's an uneasy sense of foreboding at what lies ahead for the TV show. There's also the addition of comic book faves as *Nurse Jackie*'s Merritt Wever is on board to play Dr Denise Cloyd, as is Corey Hawkins as Heath. Then another new addition is Ethan Embry as Carter, someone already a member of the Alexandria Safe-Zone group, but who has so far remained lurking in the shadows ahead of being set to butt heads with Rick in this new season.

With all of this in mind, of course, we're going to be anticipating some major twists and turns as the undead hordes of *The Walking Dead* shuffle back towards our screens. And if some of the things speculated do indeed end up happening in this next season, Season Six of the show could be the very best and most shocking to date; full of ramifications that firmly change the landscape of one of the most successful TV series of modern times. ✦

THE WALKING DEAD returns to US screens on October 11th, with a UK return set for the following night on FOX.



HORROR Obscura

This month, the municipal Martin Unsworth goes back to his roots to find out more about *INBRED*, with input from the film's director, Alex Chandon...

ARE YOU LOCAL?



In a slight departure from the usual **Horror Obscura** focus, we will be concentrating on a fairly recent film; one that may have slipped under the radar as a low budget throwaway British horror film. But with *Inbred* in 2011, infamous director Alex Chandon managed to create a movie that contains almost as much gore as a *Guinea Pig* film, is more shocking than *The Human Centipede* and arguably more morally offensive than *The Bunny Game*. Yet it passed through the BBFC uncut and played to thousands at festivals all over the world. Famously, the screening at London's Film4 FrightFest culminated in the whole audience singing along to the wicked yokel song with Chandon and actor/musician Neil Keenan. Once heard, this little ditty will be stuck in your head for weeks, trust us!

Inbred follows a pair of youth workers, Jeff (James Doherty) and Kate (Jo Hartley), who have taken some of their wayward wards on a field trip to show them the countryside and build some team



spirit. They're certainly going to need it when they get to the cottage they are staying in, as it looks as though it's been left abandoned quite some time. To celebrate the clean-up, they head for a treat at the local pub, with soft drinks only on the menu. However, The Dirty Hole is far from a nice, welcoming, village boozer one would like to drop into while on holiday. The patrons look less than friendly and are certainly not going to win any beauty contests (and the dentist clearly went out of business), and while the landlord, Jim (Seamus O'Neill) is the paragon of hospitality, there seems to be something a little off about his suspect-looking homemade cloudy lemonade and hairy 'scratchings' (there's no guarantees that they are pork).

It's clear that Jim runs more than the pub, as the locals take his lead, and even the younger, more raucous element seem to be under his command. This becomes even more apparent later on, when things really begin to get sinister.

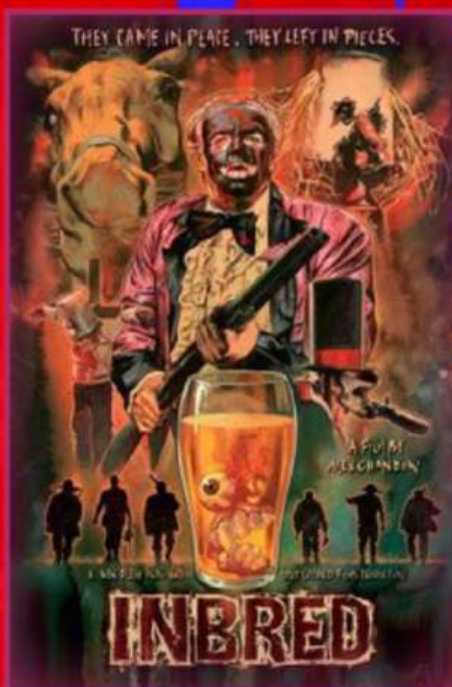
Rather than the usual dissection of the film, we thought we'd give director Chandon the chance to tell us more about it. For those unfamiliar with the British auteur, he began his filmmaking career selling VHS copies of his ultra-low budget shot-

on-tape gory shorts through fanzines and magazine ads. *Chainsaw Scumfuck* (1988), *Bad Karma* (1991) and *Drillbit* (1992) became underground classics, paving the way to his first feature, *Pervirella* (1997). It was a minor home video hit thanks to appearances by cult British scream queens Emily Booth and Eileen Daly (long before her stay in the Big Brother house), veteran actor David Warbeck (*The Beyond*) and small parts for mainstream TV stars Jonathan Ross and Mark Lamarr. Plus blink-and-you'll-miss-them roles for the Ford Brothers (directors of *The Dead*; Jonathan was also cinematographer). However, Alex would taste bigger success with his Amicus homage *Cradle of Fear* (2001), which benefitted from a starring role for *Cradle of Filth* singer Dani Filth.

Despite the attention and fame *Cradle* brought him, it was still ten years before *Inbred* would be released. We asked him why it took so long. "Ultimately, it's because it's so difficult to make a film like those two. They're polar opposites apart, but they're both really ambitious for what they are. In both cases, I was involved with the pre-production, the filming, the editing and all the effects. So it can take up to two years to do, and not earning any money doing that - so it's such

a sacrifice that it's not really sustainable to keep doing that," Alex says. "I guess I just took time off to do other little projects, things that'll pay me a little money. So I was doing some digital effects work, writing scripts and stuff. Everything I do I want to be quite ambitious, I do aim a bit high and make my life quite difficult, but it's just the nature of the films I like making."

He continues, "It's kind of catch-22, I really want to make films but it's getting more difficult to find the funding now because now that a lot of people can afford to make films at home with the equipment getting cheaper, the technology's more available. What that means is the market's just flooded with substandard stuff - especially horror films - and I think it's had an impact. You've got to rise head and shoulders above that, and that's what we tried to do with *Inbred*. I'm pretty glad it shows on screen". That it certainly does. One of the most striking things about the film is the realistic and utterly gross gore effects. Finally, after dodging the question of how much it cost for so long, Chandon is ready to reveal the true figure. "The budget was just over £100,000. In Hollywood terms, that's hardly the catering budget! I think we worked wonders," he confides. "When people hear



about that, they want you to make another *Inbred* for the same amount of money, and it just becomes harder and harder."

When it came to casting the film, Alex was once again very hands-on. "We did one casting session in Manchester, at the Lass O'Gowrie pub. Jo Hartley came in from that one. Dominic Brunt turned up with a copy of *Cradle of Fear* for me to sign. He wondered if he could be an extra, so that was cool!" This enthusiasm spread to the set too, "His character, Podge, is one of the more memorable characters, I think. He was just totally invented by Dom. He invented the facial twitch, he went and bought the costume and went and got his teeth made for it. The actors brought a lot to the parts; they'd say I've got this amazing prop, so it was like, 'yeah use the prop!' The guy who played Gris [Neil Leiper] got into method a little bit by camping out in the woods and carving his own carrots. They all added to the whole feel of it. It felt quite naturalistic."

It comes as no surprise that 'outsiders' are not particularly welcome in Mortlake, which despite the accents of the inhabitants, isn't meant to be Yorkshire as such, as Alex explained, "I didn't base it on any location, we wanted it to be stereotypical, so people

couldn't say 'oh, you're just taking the piss out of northerners, or Yorkshire people or Scottish people. I think we're quite nice to Yorkshire in the film. We make lots of reference to Yorkshire and English folklore and stuff like that, but we wanted to just throw it all in the mix so we don't get labelled as having a go at a certain group of people".

The locals have values and traditions, even the aforementioned folk song that is sung several times during the film. When it comes to what influenced him, Chandon is frank, "I just wanted to write off the wall, deranged English farmer types. I based the whole thing on the stereotypical American-style backwoods horror like *Deliverance* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. I just wanted to have English versions of all those kind of nutters. I always wanted to have the evil barman and the whole village to be really strange and fucked up".

It's this 'evil barman', Jim, who rules the roost. As the village patriarch, he is also the ringmaster in the sickening, yet highly entertaining 'shows' that are put on in the barn for the entertainment of the locals. One particular unpleasant moment comes when an agricultural muck-spreader is forced into the mouth of one of the young lads.

The infamous Mr Creosote scene in *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* comes to mind.

However, it's only after a misunderstanding and accident that the group ends up in the grimy spotlight. Jeff falls and injures himself while trying to scare off the trio of inbreds led by Jim's son Gris. Making the assumption that the carrot-loving scrote had stabbed the youth worker, Jim puts him out of his pain in the best way he knows – by removing his head. It's the point at which the story turns from anticipated threat to full-on gore-soaked nightmare. Yet it's all still handled with skilled humour from both the script and the cast.

Seamus O'Neill, in particular, is splendid as Jim, with a thick Yorkshire accent and talent as a natural entertainer for his gathered audience. A consummate professional, he even dons blackface in true minstrel style. This is clearly the village time forgot, and although he allows Gris and some of the others to take part in the performance, it seems some – himself included – still pine for 'the good old days'. There's one member of the community refused entry, however. Ron (Mark Rathbone) is gently-spoken, but perhaps his pet ferret and 'love' of animals has got him into bother in the past,



nevertheless it's actually quite sad seeing him be rejected as such. The less said about his magazine collection, the better, though.

Although they are thoroughly immoral, murdering, cannibalistic folk, the locals are actually quite a likable bunch, as the director himself acknowledges, *"What I like about it is you do tend to like the inbreds, even though they're really evil fuckers. I think people quite enjoy their company, they're a motley bunch of deranged lunatics. They're a 'special' community, but not the sort of place I'd want to end up at night, though"*.

Kate and the youngsters become the prey for the rest of the villagers when they manage to escape, and the film's ending is akin to a daylight version of the siege from *Straw Dogs*, although the outcome here is much more downbeat and bloody. It's this climax that might take some viewers off guard, but it's completely satisfying, as Alex explains, *"We kind of put the spoiler on the poster and deliberately put the happy music on the end and I love it that people get the wrong idea about what's going to happen. Initially, the script was a bit different and it had more of a 'hero' ending, but we much preferred this one, it was much better"*.

When it was released in 2012, following a successful festival run, it was met with a mixed critical reaction, although it was voted no. 25 in the STARBURST writers' end of year poll. It's something Alex is positive about, *"It's kind of weird because it went down so well, and I toured it around the world, it played all the different territories, it was nice to see it on a lot people's top five films of the year. On the other hand, it really did piss some people off for some reason – I don't know why! I guess it's a little bit un-PC and a bit in-your-face. I tend to make Marmite films – people either love them or hate them, which is much better than everyone taking that middle ground of 'yeah, it's alright'. I was really pleased with the reaction it got"*.

As the film is about to debut on UK TV, fully uncut, Chandon is happy the film will reach a bigger audience. However, it didn't fare so well in the States, *"I heard a rumour that they might have had to edit the film in America; I think it was a bit hard-core for them. I don't think they really understood the humour. The American trailer makes it look like a really nasty Texas Chain Saw Massacre type of film. They're selling it with the brutality. I always saw it as a kind of*

very dark comedy. You've got a bit of gore, then you can laugh about it".

Hopefully, the screening will reopen interest in the folk of Mortlake, and Alex has ideas for where he would go with the story, *"I'd want to know more about them really; know more about their history and how they get away with it for hundreds of years and stuff like that,"* although he's not averse to setting it in other countries, he adds, *"I think if we did one in England, it would definitely be a prequel rather than a sequel. Go back to the '70s, have them hanging out with Jimmy Savile and stuff like that, listening to Gary Glitter. Just make it very wrong. That could be fun, because no-one's got mobile phones and we could dress everyone in stupid flares - that could be a good one"*.

In the meantime, grab a pint of home-made lemonade, a bag of scratchings and get ready f'show...



Alex Chandon's *INBRED* screens September 25th on HORROR CHANNEL (SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138).



by Robin Pierce

Sean Cain

Writer/director/editor/actor SEAN CAIN has been in the industry for a number of years, and has already managed to attract big-name stars to appear in his movies. We needed to find out what drives him...



STARBURST: How did you get started as an independent filmmaker?

Sean Cain: I was going to junior college in Northern California and using their offline editing system (one of those VHS to VHS linear things) to put movie clips with classical music. A friend of a friend saw what I was doing and took me to meet Victor (*Jeepers Creepers*) Salva. He had only made one movie at that point [*Clownhouse*], but it was for Francis Coppola, so people made a big deal about it. He liked to have movie-watching parties, but the catch was it would be *his* films only. Slightly narcissistic, but I felt like I was hanging with the Hollywood cool kids... only in my suburban hometown of Concord. Where absolutely nothing ever happened!

Anyway, soon after this party, Victor and I became friends. Sometime later, he decided he was going to make another movie with money from local investors. It was the gay version of *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*. I got to work on the film and then afterwards helped Victor edit it. Although I graduated with a BA in film at San Francisco State, I learned more working on this project than anything my professors taught me during my 4-year stint there. It was like the curtain was pulled back in Oz and the great and powerful was revealed to be just some dude in stained boxer shorts. Because of this, I started doing my film, *Naked Beneath the Water*, and the rest is history.

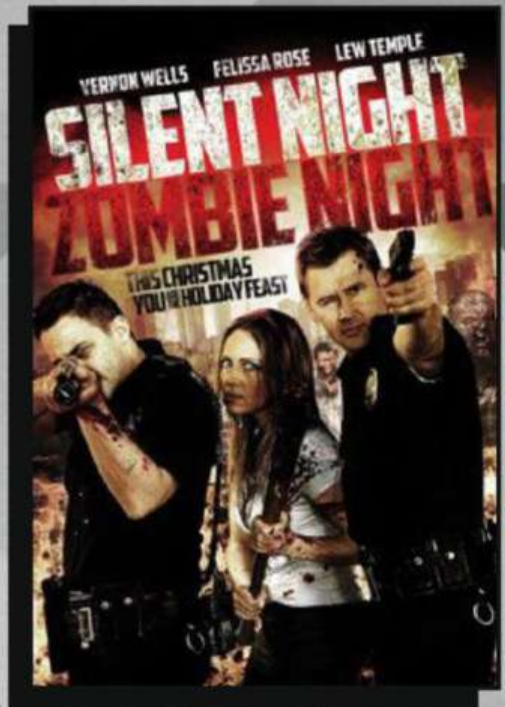
What are the difficulties you face as an independent?

Being an independent filmmaker was a lot different in the mid-90s than it is now. When I finished the first version of *Naked Beneath the Water* in 1994, I sold copies on VHS through magazines like *Film Threat* and *Alternative Cinema*. There was a wave of indie films and filmmakers just around the corner – the era of Kevin Smith and Robert Rodriguez in the mainstream, but also weird horror stuff like Scooter McCrae's *Shatter Dead* or J. R. Bookwalter's *The Dead Next Door*, not to mention documentary/horror *Hated: GG Allin and the Murder Junkies*. I have fond memories of my early 20s showing friends GG Allin shove a banana up his ass. To this day, they still remember this and look back with... fondness.

The world was our proverbial oyster. DVD was right around the corner and even if you only spent a few bucks on your film it would be distributed, plus you could make a couple of bucks to pay the bills! All you needed was a lack of sense and a group of fellow misfits to help achieve your 'vision'.

Flash forward to 2015. DVD has been replaced by streaming and the world of low budget horror is pretty much dead. It's almost like going back to '94 where the only people who give a shit about what you're doing are the hardcore collectors of horror and cult films. Only now I'm in my 40s and I can no longer live off my parents and credit cards!

SILENT NIGHT ZOMBIE NIGHT



Without trying to sound too much like Grandpa sitting on his porch and yelling at the neighborhood kids to 'get offa mah lawn!', it feels like this new generation of low budget filmmakers only care about putting up bullshit credits on IMDB, getting Twitter followers and taking selfies of their supposed #setlife. Barf-o-rama. To make a long story longer, the only difficulty that's never changed whether it's 1994 or 2015 is a lack of money and somehow not getting ripped off by shady distributors.

Take us through the films you've directed...

My first film was called *Naked Beneath the Water*; I made it for about \$4k. I conceived of a scenario (right around the time MTV's *The Real World* first

appeared) in which serial killers competed against each other to become Public Enemy #1 for the year. The first version was finished in 1994, which I sold via the magazines. However, it wasn't until the early 2000s with DVDs of these similar low budget films being sold that I decided to reshoot about 75% of the movie and get it distributed. Which finally happened in 2008.

Because of this film, I met Wes and Mary Laurie, who financed my next two films, *Silent Night, Zombie Night* and *Breath of Hate*. The deal with them was I would write SNZN while Wes penned *BoH*. We filmed them almost back to back, with SNZN shot in December of 2008 and *BoH* in 2009.

SNZN was distributed in 2011 and did decently, but *BoH* was not a genre film and kind of weird so it was much harder

to get out there, but will finally be coming out later this year.

Sometime after that, I hooked up with producer Anthony Fankhauser and started editing these monster movies for the Syfy channel. My breakthrough came around 2012 with a dinosaur film called *Jurassic Attack*, which was a complete mess. They had fired the first director after a couple of days and he had to take over doing both directing and producing duties. You can imagine how difficult that must have been! Anyway, during the post-production, it was decided we needed additional footage, especially the B-story part, and he tapped me up to direct this.

You have a tendency to use a stock of actors you've recruited over the years,

many of them notable cult names. How did this happen?

This business is full of the biggest bunch of fucktards on the planet! But once in a while you find someone who has a trifecta of qualities – talent, reliability and a pleasure to be around. These are the people to grab on to and hold tightly. One example is Vernon (*Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*) Wells. I met him in 2008 during some cop movie that'll never see the light of day and now, eight years later, I've gotten him in five movies. I love that guy and will put him in a film if given the chance. Same goes for so many other folks I've met over the

years. You just collect as you go from project to project.

The latest film to be released is *Jurassic City* – how was that conceived, and did the finished article differ from the original idea?

Jurassic City first began as *Jurassic Block*. I love to read the comments from haters who accuse me of ripping off *Jurassic World*. Only problem is that I started shooting this thing back in May of 2013 and they didn't even announce *JW* until December of that year. However, the project first began soon after I did *Jurassic Attack*

for producer Anthony Fankhauser.

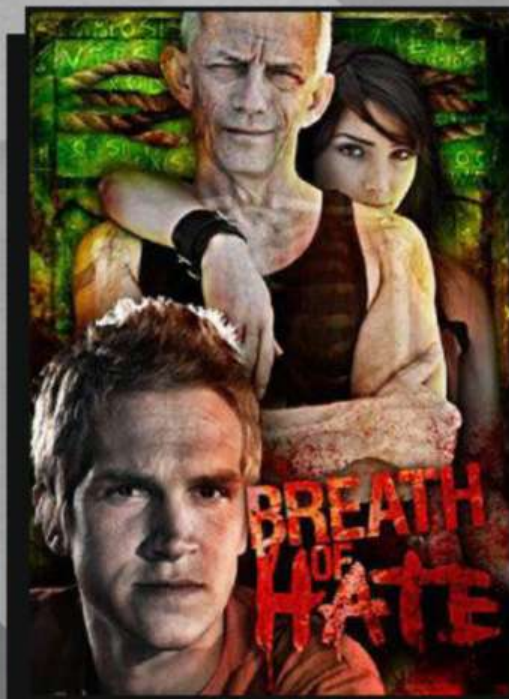
I had pitched him an idea, which was a cross between *Attack the Block* and *The Raid: Redemption*. It was a bunch of teenagers who take on genetically modified dinosaurs that had escaped into the 'hood. They were using their high-rise building as their personal buffet.

About six months after I finished working on that and *Jurassic Attack* landed a really sweet \$\$\$ deal at the Syfy channel, he came to me and said he wanted to do this movie; only instead of kids, it needed to be sorority girls and because they couldn't get a high-rise building, we would shoot it at a prison.

JURASSIC CITY



BREATH OF HATE



THE LAST HOUSE



I thought about it for a second. Do I waver in my initial 'vision'? It was a short second of thinking. I got to write, direct and edit a film that had a bigger budget than anything I had done previously. Fuck yeah, I was going to do this!

The goofy part was really after the fact. The distributors changed the title to *Jurassic City* and put a big T-rex on the poster to try and sell it like a Godzilla movie. Then when *Jurassic World* had a release date they decided to cash in on that instead. Gotta catch that audience who doesn't know any better with a mockbuster! Yes, I realise the CG isn't as good as *Jurassic Park*, which came out in 1993. That's because they used ANIMATRONICS... made by STAN WINSTON!

Either way, whatever those sales people

and distributors are doing, it seems to be working. The film has been sold worldwide and seems to be doing fairly well. All those haters are going to hate no matter what, so I really couldn't give a fuck. Every movie is the 'worst movie ever' until the next one comes out then that becomes the worst. I love this movie, love the actors in the movie and think some of the CG shots are way better than the typical Syfy type movie.

What's the next project next for you?

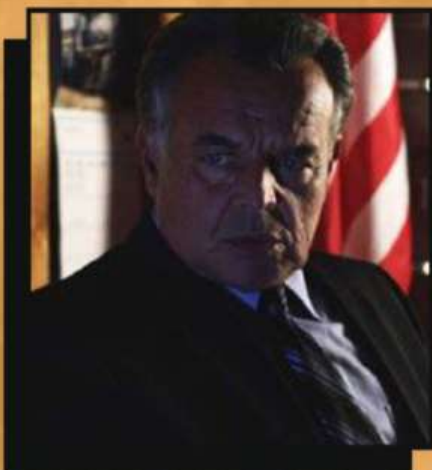
I'm currently in pre-production for another monster movie called *Terror Birds*, which should be shooting in Texas next month. I didn't write the script, but it's pretty good and the creature isn't one we've seen a lot

before. I'm told these apex predator birds actually existed at one time.

Any words of advice for aspiring filmmakers?

Many years ago, before they started charging an arm and a leg for such things, I did a video where I asked Bruce Campbell to give a shout out to all his fans at Velvet Hammer Films. He said, "Get real jobs!" That is actually pretty sound advice. But if you are stupid like myself then you better at least have passion for what you're doing. Because it's going to take a lot of doing.

JURASSIC CITY is available on DVD now.



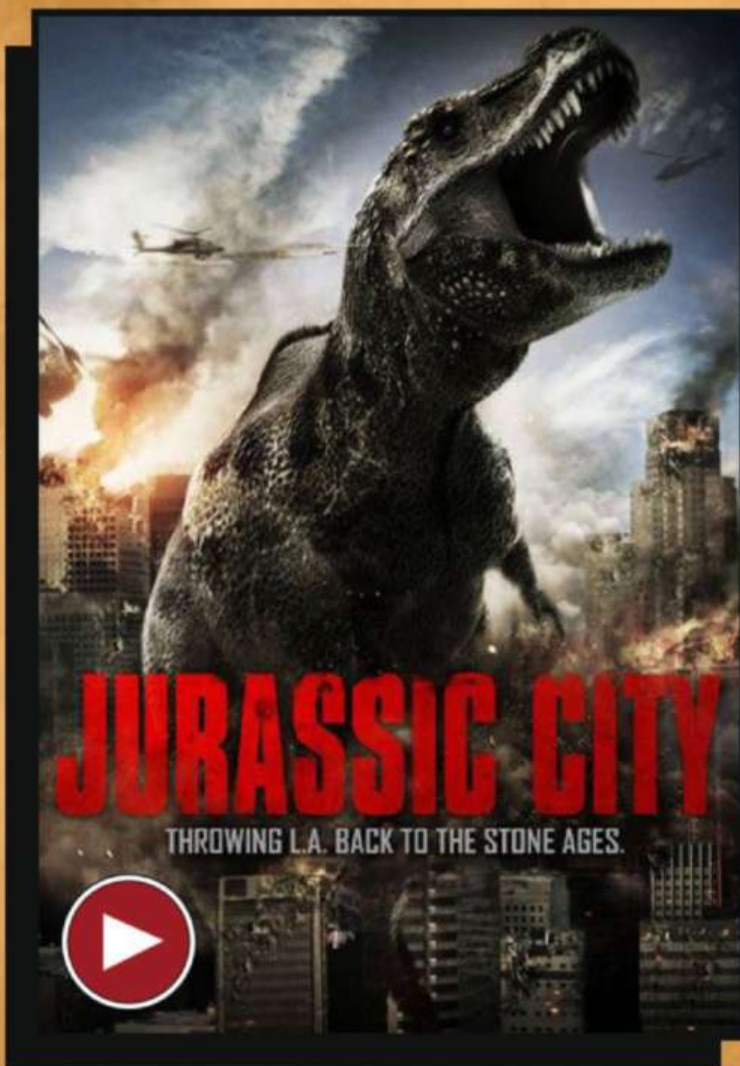
JURASSIC CITY

MOVIE REVIEW: JURASSIC CITY / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: SEAN CAIN / STARRING: RAY WISE, KEVIN GAGE, DANA MELANIE, SOFIA MATTSSON, KAYLA CARLYLE, VANESSA JOHNSON, JACK FORCINITO, VERNON WELLS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

First of all, the alluring box art, showing a Tyrannosaurus Rex towering over an SUV with pterodactyls soaring overhead, doesn't appear in the film, and, although mentioned as a star in the write-up on the back of the DVD case, Dallas Bryce Howard doesn't actually appear anywhere in the film either. But the audacity of the publicity department's misleading advertising aside (she's not credited on the actual film) – the movie is actually not bad.

Jurassic Park or World, this ain't. Think of it more as independent film director/screenwriter/editor Sean Cain's Jurassic Lark. Inexplicably, there are dinosaurs on the loose in modern day Los Angeles, running wild and causing general havoc.

The story takes place in one night, with an impressive but brief final segment set the following morning. No explanation is given for the sudden unwelcome arrival of



Velociraptors among us, and the motley groups we follow during the film's lean 85-minute running time seem to accept their appearance pretty easily and quickly.

The main setting is a prison, where a particularly unpleasant trio of teenaged sorority sisters are placed in a holding cell with a bunch of other miscreants, a couple of alcoholics and a hardened criminal – all of whom must somehow work together to escape the building, which is now the hunting ground for a pack of hungry raptors. Elsewhere, the military's Special Ops unit are trying and failing to contain the situation.

The CGI effects are what you'd expect for a budget-conscious independent feature: varying in quality, but they serve their purpose in moving the story forward, and Cain wisely doesn't dwell on them, but rather plays to his strengths in directing a strong cast.

Over the years, Cain has managed to pull together a regular acting troupe in his features, and we see a few of his regulars here. Cult film and TV aficionados will no doubt enjoy the performances of Vernon Wells (Mad Max 2, InnerSpace, Commando) Felissa Rose (Sleepaway Camp) and Ray Wise (Twin Peaks).

Creative and fast-paced, it feels like there should be a sequel.



STRAIGHT ON 'TIL MORNING:



Another classic fairy tale story getting a revamp? With Steven Spielberg's HOOK now a distant memory, maybe it's time to head to Neverland once more, this time to find out more about the origin of PAN...



Once upon a time, there was a little boy who never wanted to grow up. So he ran away, and he never did. This is not his story.

If you're hoping for a straight-up prequel, then you're in for a disappointment. *Pan* is not a prequel, a movie crafted out of the scraps of backstory Peter - and J. M. Barrie - allowed us in the play. *Pan* is an homage to its source material, a reimagining that uproots Peter from his Edwardian beginnings and drops him in the middle of World War II. It's bold and ambitious, and it might be darker than the Peter Pan we know, but does it work? At the very least, it's going to be one hell of a ride.

The film opens with Peter's mother Mary (Amanda Seyfried) leaving her baby son on the steps of The Lambeth Home for Boys. This is entirely contrary to the original text, where Peter says he ran away from his mother and father after hearing what it was to grow up into a man. This action shaped Peter's opinion of adults into something negative, something hostile and to be avoided at all costs. Without this, it's likely we'll meet a very different Peter (Levi Miller), one who is curious about his mother - who may even want her - and who goes snooping through his caretaker's office looking for clues.

It's there that he finds a panpipe pendant and a letter, which promises Peter that his mother will see him 'in this world or another'. On the surface, this sounds like a pretty way to reference the afterlife, but Peter takes it a different way. He thinks it means another world - another planet or realm or universe - and he's proven right when he and some other boys are snatched from their beds during the night.

This is where we meet the film's primary antagonist and Peter's kidnapper: Blackbeard (Hugh Jackman), a proto-Captain Hook who the 1911 novel says was once Hook's superior and one of Peter Pan's adversaries. Blackbeard takes the boys to Neverland and puts them to work in a mine, where Peter makes friends with one of his fellow miners, James Hook (Garrett Hedlund). It doesn't take long before they hatch a plan to escape, either back to London or to wherever Peter hopes his mother to be; but before freedom, Peter has to meet Blackbeard, and they confront each other aboard the pirate's ship. It's there that he learns that there is a prophecy 'from when the fairy kingdoms reigned on [Neverland]... of a boy who would be disappeared from [Neverland] until he was old enough to return and lead an uprising against [Blackbeard]. A boy who could fly.' Peter's panpipe pendant marks him as the



PAN

A Look at Joe Wright's *Pan*

by Kate Fathers



boy in the prophecy - a boy not from Earth - further distancing him from Barrie's original narrative. But as with most prophecies, Peter doesn't seem to buy it.

After an explosive escape, Hook and Peter then have to navigate through the jungles of Neverland. If Hook's intentions aren't in question already, they certainly will be post-escape, which sets up the betrayal narrative that will turn James in to Barrie's Captain Hook. It's in this setting that Peter and Hook meet Tiger Lily (Rooney Mara) and her tribe, who capture them and take them back to their camp.

This is where we reach the controversial part of the film. Tiger Lily and her tribe (referred to in the novel in an archaically offensive manner) are obviously described as Native American, and critics and fans took offense to Rooney Mara's casting in a role that naturally should have gone to a Native American woman. This casting fed in to previous racist portrayals of the tribe, one of the most famous being the Disney animated *Peter Pan* and its song 'What Made the Red Man Red'. But director Joe Wright appears to have taken Peter Pan's racism in to account, and it seems like he has scrapped the Native American connection. *Pan*'s Tiger Lily is part of a multi-racial tribe, whose leader is

played by Australian Aboriginal actor Jack Charles. Their costuming further divorces them from real-life Native peoples, being made up of colourful patchwork and yarn, as does the scant amount of dialogue that's appeared in the trailers, which is devoid of offensive stereotype.

Back with Tiger Lily, Peter and Hook are treated as hostiles until they discover Peter's pendant, which marks him as 'the Pan', someone who is 'the tribe's greatest warrior'. It's likely during this time that Peter slowly starts to come around to the idea of being Neverland's saviour, learning more about his role from Tiger Lily and taking his first tentative steps towards flight. Once Tiger Lily is established as an ally (much earlier than in Barrie's tale), she joins Hook and Peter and takes them to Mermaid Lagoon, which is home to a massive crocodile. Pirates are afraid of crocodiles, and this encounter will either reveal Hook as a pirate (a perfect betrayal for Peter) or will sow the seed for Hook's later fear of crocodiles. Certainly, this crocodile is likely the one that gets to snack on Hook's hand.

Now that Peter has a second friend, it's likely that Hook's true agenda will start to become more obvious. The foreshadowing will grow thicker and suspicions will rise and Hook's loyalty to Peter will be

tested only for him to, gradually, fail. It's a common plot, but one that is kind of perfect for Peter Pan. It will add greater weight to the Peter-Hook rivalry, and make it something more complicated and personal than the original kid vs. adult dynamic. If Peter is looking for his mother during the film, as previously supposed, then a betrayal by an adult may also kill this desire, souring him on parental figures. If Hook promised information about Peter's mother, a lie would also be a devastating blow. Whatever it is, the betrayal will happen in the climax, which sees our heroes back with Blackbeard.

As this is a fantasy film, there's going to be a big fantasy battle. Tiger Lily goes after Blackbeard, and Hook takes over a pirate ship while Peter officially becomes Peter Pan, flying, crowing and, ultimately, fulfilling the prophecy by defeating Blackbeard. This will also be when Hook becomes Captain Hook, complete with loss of hand. When the action is over, we are left with the beginning of JM Barrie's story, altered but still very much the same: Peter with his newly-freed Lost Boys, Tiger Lily off with her tribe, and Hook on the Jolly Roger plotting his revenge. All that's left is Wendy, and she's waiting...

PAN flies into UK cinemas on October 16th.



PAN

REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG
SCREEN GENRE
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



THE MESSENGER

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: DAVID BLAIR / SCREENPLAY: ANDREW KIRK / STARRING: ROBERT SHEEHAN, TAMZIN MERCHANT, LILY COLE, JACK FOX, ALEX WYNNDHAM, DAVID O'HARA, JOELY RICHARDSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Jack (Sheehan) can see dead people. Or can he? It's this question that saturates David Blair's bleak portrayal of an outcast man who believes he is beset with the heavy burdens of the dead as he struggles to overcome his past and reconcile his future.

Following the death of Mark (a high-profile war correspondent) outside the apartment that he shared with his girlfriend, Sarah, Jack finds his self-imposed isolation violated by the journalist's confused spirit. Explaining that he simply wants Jack to help him say goodbye to Sarah, Mark not so much haunts as stalks Jack until he gets his way. The result of which does not go smoothly.

While we see inside Jack's tormented world, we also see it from the outside, presenting us with an all-too-familiar sight of a dishevelled and erratic man who talks and shouts to himself with little regard for his surroundings. The consequences of this behaviour are evident throughout as he's (literally) kicked out of pubs, chased down the street and ridiculed. Yet Jack is

no Derek Acorah, he has no ulterior motive for passing on the messages of the dead; in fact, he'd rather they left him alone completely. Driven almost to the point of madness, the only solace Jack has is in the arms of his sister, Emma (Cole) and her troubled son who seems to share Jack's unwanted gift.

There is a lot of heart and soul in this film. While comparisons can easily be brought with the likes of *The Sixth Sense*, there is very little attempt to glorify the thriller aspects of the story (which are there for the taking but are instead left largely unanswered). Instead, the focus is squarely on Jack and his battle both internal (fleshed out through intermittent flashbacks to a life-changing event as a child) and by default external, as self-harm begins to seep into the picture.

Without a doubt, Sheehan is the standout star of this beautifully crafted film. His portrayal of someone who is both outwardly suffering from mental illness and inwardly struggling to help those grieving is

outstanding. Coupled with Blair's stark yet beguiling direction and Ian Livingstone's haunting score, *The Messenger* is a unique film that, while not necessarily playing well to the masses, is a thought-provoking and unforgettable experience.

GRANT KEMPSTER

EXPECTED ★★★★★★ ★★ 7

ACTUAL ★★★★★★ ★★ 8





AMERICAN ULTRA

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: NIMA NOURIZADEH / SCREENPLAY: MAX LANDIS / STARRING: JESSE EISENBERG, KRISTEN STEWART, TOPHER GRACE, CONNIE BRITTON, WALTON GOGGINS, BILL PULLMAN, TONY HALE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If you've seen the trailer for Nima Nourizadeh's *American Ultra* at a recent trip to your local fleapit/multiplex then you've actually already seen the best of it. This grungy, sweaty, messy, bloody, subversive action movie – a *Kingsman* for stoners – has one clever concept imbedded deep within its zoned-out heart, but once it's shot that particular bolt it runs itself into the ground and really hasn't got anywhere to go other

than where it's already been.

Pothead Mike (Eisenberg) lives a rather mundane and potentially idyllic life in Nowheresville, USA with his sweet squeeze Phoebe (Stewart), but he has dark secrets in his past that even he's utterly unaware of. When he finds a couple of strangers tampering with his car in the parking lot of the downmarket grocery store where he ekes out a living, he suddenly explodes into action as

a ruthless, agile killing machine and within seconds two men lay dead. Not unnaturally, Mike freaks out and calls on Phoebe for help and moral support. Mike, as it turns out, is a brainwashed CIA 'sleeper' agent, a super-soldier adept at extreme death-dealing and now the subject of a CIA termination order. His world is quickly turned upside down and inside out when an army of CIA agents, including the psychopathic Laughter (Goggins), turn up en masse with orders to wipe Mike out with extreme force. To compound Mike's very bad day, it also seems that his beloved Phoebe isn't quite who he thought she was either...

One of the main problems with *American Ultra* is that it really has just one ace up its sleeve and when it's out in the open, there's not much left it can do to surprise its audience. We know that Mike is capable of extraordinary violence – and how – and it's just a matter of seeing him come to terms with it and using his skills to outwit the CIA, led by the inept and over-ambitious Adrian Yates (Grace). The film's uneven tone doesn't really help either. It's at its best

before the madness kicks off and Eisenberg seems more at home as Mike the eager-to-please stoner than as Mike the kick-ass killer. The film's humour is shunted aside in favour of bone-crunching violence and when these are run side-by-side both are compromised, as they're uneasy bedfellows which don't sit well together. But lovers of buckets of blood and people getting shot in the head will find much to enjoy, Eisenberg is typically good value and Kristen Stewart, distanced now from the loathsome *Twilight* franchise, is really shaping up into a formidable screen talent.

American Ultra isn't really able to live up to the potential of its principal conceit and, whilst it hasn't found much favour at the Box Office, we suspect it'll develop into a bit of a cult favourite (stick around for the inspired animated end credits sequence, by the way) and find its true audience with the beer 'n' pizza stay-at-home crowd.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++ 6



HITMAN: AGENT 47

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: ALEKSANDER BACH / SCREENPLAY: SKIP WOODS, MICHAEL FINCH / STARRING: RUPERT FRIEND, HANNAH WARE, ZACHARY QUINTO, CIARÁN HINDS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

"This is never going to end, is it?" gasps the battle-weary Katia (Ware) after one of *Hitman*: Agent 47's endlessly frenetic fight scenes/car chases. Despite a lean running time of not much more than ninety minutes, chances are you'll be thinking something very similar at right about this point in the movie.

This reviewer is happy to admit he's not much of a gamer

– a recent potential *Angry Birds* addiction was nipped in the bud sharpish – and thus absolutely unqualified to comment on whether this latest *Hitman* movie (a reboot of a franchise kicked off in 2007) pays due reverence to the enduring stealth video game series. The film does, apparently, pay homage to the games here and there but, out of necessity, it has to do something rather different

for a cinema-going audience. Unfortunately, all it's really able to do is take bits of *The Terminator* (remorseless killing machine), *The Matrix* (stylish fight sequences) and *James Bond* (nice clothes and exotic locations) and hope they'll be enough to paper over the cracks in a story which fatally fails to engage the audience's interest and has to resort to extreme uber-violence and style-over-substance visuals.

Never trust a movie which info-dumps all over the opening credits; it's a sure sign of a clumsy script content to take lazy short cuts. A bored voice-over tells of Dr Litvenko (Hinds), his plans to create a breed of super-powered, super-intelligent assassins known as 'Agents' and the crisis of conscience which saw him abandon the project and run away, leaving behind his young daughter Katia. Years later, ruthless rivals determined to replicate the technology are about to locate Litvenko but are intercepted by the implacable Agent 47 (Friend), who slaughters them all. Katia is befriended by the mysterious John Smith (Quinto) but it seems that his philanthropic nature isn't quite what it appears. Soon,

Katia finds herself on the run with Agent 47 and ending up in Singapore, chased by agents and soldiers of the Syndicate who will stop at nothing to get their hands on Litvenko and the secrets of the 'Agent' initiative.

As generic action movies go, *Hitman* isn't bad, but it's utterly uninvolved and our interest is really only maintained by its tireless (and occasionally tiresome) action sequences. Gun battle follows fist fight follows car chase; the violence is graphic and bloody and so relentless it eventually becomes wearing. Friend (who replaced the late Paul Walker in the lead role) is tolerably bland as Agent 47 and Ware throws herself into the murky narrative with gusto. It looks brilliant, the action is beautifully filmed (it really shows off its stunning locations), but by the end – despite a mid-credits sting which suggests/threatens a sequel – you'll have had quite enough of the whole thing. It's really more of a miss than a hit, man.

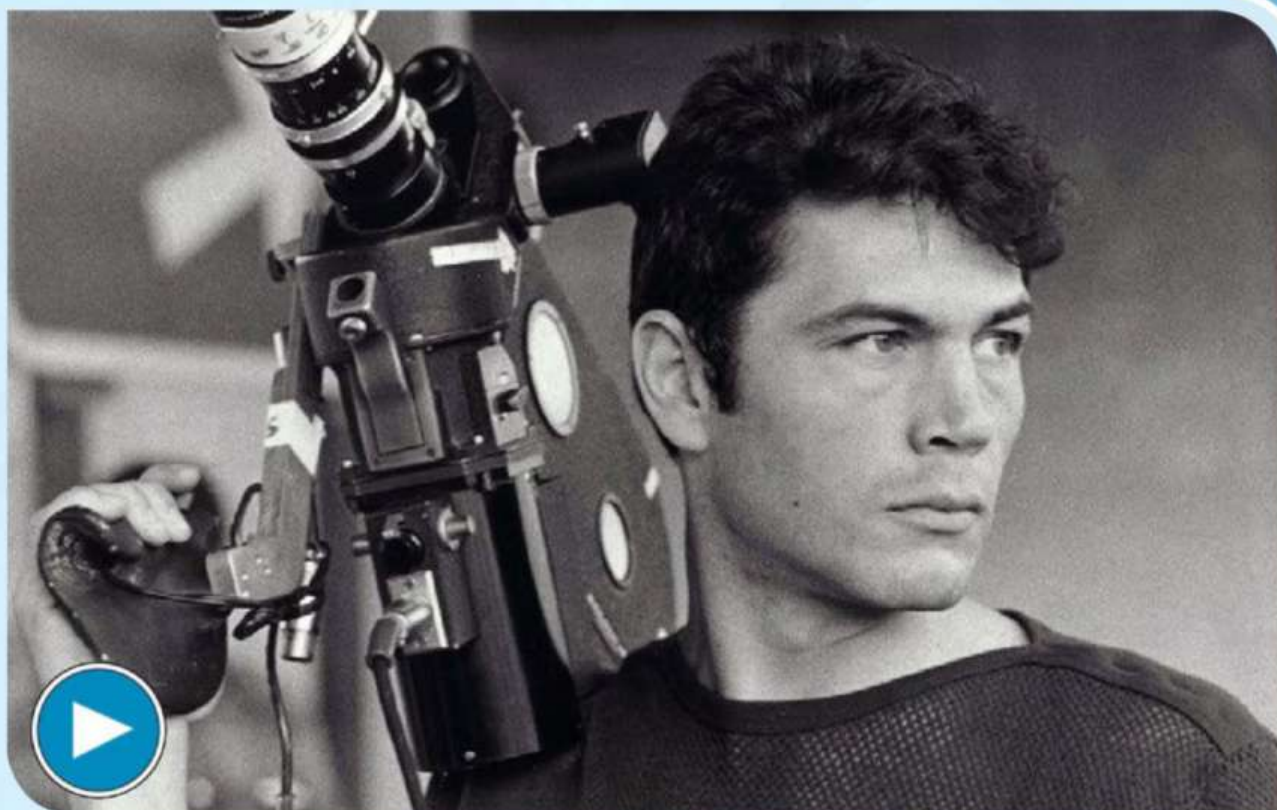
PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ++++++ 5

ACTUAL ++++++ 4

REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



MEDIUM COOL (1969)

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: HASKELL WEXLER / STARRING: ROBERT FORSTER, VERNA BLOOM, PETER BONERZ, MARIANNA HILL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Medium Cool is the story of television news cameraman John Cassellis (Robert Forster), who lives his personal life with the same icy detachment he affords a subject through his viewfinder.

In fact, in the film's brilliant introduction, we see Cassellis and soundman Gus (Peter Bonerz) pull up behind a car wreck and film the possibly-dead victim sprawled across the road before - when Cassellis has all the shots he needs - agreeing they should call an ambulance. That alone tells us all we need to know. Cassellis is a man who takes his date to the roller-derby so they can watch the players beat each other up. He is a man who loves to shoot film, who is immune to violence. But it is only when he is harangued by a group of black militants about the media's inherent racism, is angered to discover that his footage has been routinely turned over to the FBI, and meets a lonely young woman (Verna Bloom) struggling to bring up her teenage son, that

he begins to allow himself to feel again.

All of this plays out against a backdrop of the United States in racial and political turmoil. "America is Wonderful", an ad declares with no sense of its own irony. The National Guard rehearse riot drills as the age of flower-power innocence boils over into a rage of racial disharmony and Vietnam War-fuelled discontent.

When, in the film's last act, the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago deteriorates into carnage and we watch Verna Bloom, a wide-eyed innocent in her bright yellow sun dress, clambering over the makeshift barricades, staring in shocked disbelief at the battered and bloodied protesters (who are all real, the riots were actually happening as these scenes were being filmed), we are left in no doubt as to the power, uniqueness and cultural importance of writer/director Haskell Wexler's remarkable film. Part dramatic tour-de-force, part cinema verité, Wexler not only

skewers the inherent cynicism of television news just as successfully as Network would do (in a far different way) eight years later, he also documents America at a time when 'the land of the free and the home of the brave' was anything but.

Medium Cool is a cinematic body-blow, a film of only slightly flawed genius that everyone needs to see, and Eureka's Masters of Cinema Blu-ray presentation won't disappoint. The print is flawless and the extras are as plentiful and educational as we've come to expect from an MoC package. A day after watching it, we still can't get Medium Cool out of our head. We simply can't recommend it highly enough.

Extras: Audio commentary / Three featurettes / Trailer / 28-page booklet

IAN WHITE

+++++10



ZARDOZ (1974)

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JOHN BOORMAN / STARRING: SEAN CONNERY, CHARLOTTE RAMPLING, SARA KESTELMAN, NIAL BUGGY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

John Boorman's contribution to cinematic weirdness, *Zardoz*, is a movie that isn't so much watched as experienced. The 1974 science fiction classic is a tribute to hubris, tight budgets and some of the more melancholy aspects of the genre. It's a movie you should see, if only to join in on the conversation about it - one that has been going on for over forty years.

Set in the distant future, *Zardoz* opens with a man in a

silly blue hat and a drawn-on beard explaining to us that all is not what it seems. The opening credits feature a giant, stone floating head that then proceeds to be worshipped as a god by a horde of scantily clad savages. The head tells its followers that violence is good and sex is bad. The camera then focuses on a gun-wielding Sean Connery, who is clad in what appears to be a bright red tankini. The movie gets much stranger after that...

Ostensibly, *Zardoz* is an examination of the consequences of lying to the masses, as well as a speculative dive into what happens to a society when the elite simply cannot die and refuse to share their wealth. In practice it's mostly an excuse to see Connery and his co-star, Charlotte Rampling, run about in very skimpy clothing. The only honest answer to the question "What is *Zardoz* about?" is to say that it's about 105 minutes long. Anything else is up for speculation.

The Blu-ray version has been lovingly restored and the print is crisp and clear. This version keeps Geoffrey Unsworth's original cinematography, and yet adds clarity and definition; we still get the hazy, dreamlike quality that makes the movie work, but we can also see every nook and cranny of the floating giant head of *Zardoz*.

Arrow are the established masters of cult movie releases and they have packed the Blu-ray with a pile of new features. We get interviews with John

Boorman, Sara Kestelman and Niall Buggy (the latter is a particular delight as he is the voice of *Zardoz*, after all). There's also conversations with the crew, and whole thing works very well as decades have passed since the movie was made, so we get well polished anecdotes about one of cinema's strangest experiences. The audio commentary is definitely worth your time as well, as the director is on top form as he talks about the movie.

If this isn't in your movie collection, it should be. If nothing else, it's one of the few features that start with Z, but really you should own it merely to broaden your horizons as far as it goes. If you're already a fan, then this new Blu-ray is a real treat and worth your time.

Extras: Audio commentary with John Boorman / New interviews with cast and crew / Radio spots / Trailer / Collector's booklet

ED FORTUNE

+++++10



MADMAN (1982)

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JOE GIANNONE / STARRING: GAYLEN ROSS, TONY FISH, HARRIET BASS, TOM CANDELA, PAUL EHLERS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Many are familiar with the behemoths of the slasher subgenre - The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, Halloween, Friday the 13th - but the American slasher cycle of the late '70s and '80s produced some slightly lesser known gems, such as *Madman* from 1982. Originally, the plot was based on the Cropsy urban legend, only for the crew to find out in pre-production that *The Burning* (1981) was filming the exact same premise. Due alterations followed. Despite this hiccup, *Madman* became a pretty popular drive-in film for

kids in the '80s eager to have their proverbial pants scared off.

The film opens with a fantastic scene set around the campfire. One camp counsellor, TP (Tony 'Fish' Nunziata) is singing a song that prophesises of the chaos to come. Interestingly, this song is accompanied by interwoven images that flash-forward to later in the film and reveal the camp counsellor's fate. It's a nice piece of experimental filmmaking that riffs on the conventions of the slasher genre by saying, 'yeah, you

know what's coming' whilst also adding a degree of tension. One of the great aspects about *Madman* is how it constructs its own mythology, and TP's song is followed by a campfire tale from elderly head counsellor Max (Carl Fredericks). Max tells the story of a local farmer who one day decides to kill his family, then heads to the local pub for a swift pint (as you do) only for the patrons to notice his bloody axe on the bar and hang him for his crimes. As it happens, the hanging wasn't enough to see off old *Madman* Marz, and if you dare utter his name above a whisper he won't be happy at all. Naturally, a cocky teenager, Richie (Tom Candela), decides to call the killer out and spoil the camping trip for everyone.

What ensues next is a thoroughly enjoyable slasher film, as *Madman* Marz chases the counsellors through the woods with his big axe. There really are some top death scenes on offer here, including a hanging, an impaling, and a great scene with a car - all of which feature practical effects that would make Tom Savini proud.

Fair enough, the dialogue is a bit cheesy and the characters aren't the most complex bunch of people you'll ever meet, but *Madman* has its stylistic

accomplishments. As the feature-length documentary included on the Blu-ray reveals, the film only cost a measly \$350,000 so the distinct aesthetic is impressive. The fact it is shot entirely at night gives *Madman* a really isolative and claustrophobic feel, and the squelchy, synth-laden score that pervades the film only enhances this. The blue-rinsed, moonlit cinematography throughout also adds to the atmospheric ambience and it looks impressive with a 4K transfer for this release.

Ignore that *Madman* got a frankly preposterous rating of 17% on Rotten Tomatoes and take it from us that if you like your slasher films, you'll appreciate this. Not to mention the fact that *Madman* Marz has his own badass theme tune that appears in the credits. Jason Voorhees wishes he had a theme tune half as good as *Madman* Marz...

Extras: *The Legend Still Lives* documentary / Two audio commentaries / Four featurettes / Interviews / TV spots / Stills gallery / Trailer / Collector's booklet

FORD MADDOX BROWN

+++++7



THE CREATURE WALKS AMONG US (1956)

DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: JOHN SHERWOOD / SCREENPLAY: ARTHUR A. ROSS / STARRING: JEFF MORROW, REX REASON, LEIGH SNOWDEN, GREGG PALMER / RELEASED: OUT NOW

We're going to start with a minor spoiler. There are rules to black & white monster-movies and one of the most unbreakable (rule #3b, to be precise) is that if the leading lady puts on a nightie within 15 minutes of the end, she will be carried off by the monster so she can be rescued from its monstrous/misunderstood (delete where applicable) clutches at the climax. But here in *The Creature Walks Among Us* (1956), Leigh Snowden (the only woman in the cast) dutifully dons her night attire at the 5-minutes-to-go mark, only to be completely ignored by the

Creature when he turns up in mid-climactic-rampage. What? Are they deliberately subverting audience expectation? Or did they just leave it too late to bother? Just what are we to make of this third instalment in the Gill Man trilogy that started so memorably with *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954)?

Millionaire Doctor Barton (Morrow) is in pursuit of the Creature up some lagoon or another as he reckons that the fact that it's at the evolutionary crossover-point between water-dwelling and living-on-land will be dead useful when mankind

moves into space (okaaay...). To this end, he has brought the Vagabondia III, a significantly Bigger Boat than *The Rita* in the original *Creature*, and a team of scientists and guides to ensure the correct level of trunk-wearing manly rivalry so peculiar to the series. He also brings his wife (Snowden) on swimsuit duties and to provide a bit of sexual tension to the testosterone. They capture the Creature but accidentally set fire to him, like you do. But it turns out that his skin underneath is human-like (but still monsterish) and his gills don't work anymore. He even has to wear clothes to protect his skin. He's become one of us! Or has he? Who are the real monsters? The Gill Man or the humans and their trunk-wearing rivalries? Golly. Perhaps they were subverting audience expectations after all...

In a sense, there's much to recommend *Walks Among Us*. There's the usual underwater photography (which was a reasonably big deal in the '50s even if they weren't 3D this time out) and the addition of sonar to the scientists' arsenal gives rise to some brilliant proto-Dallas-in-the-ventilator-shafts moments.

You even have to admire the whole who-are-the-monsters? angle. But there are problems. The new "more human" Gill Man rubber outfit just doesn't have the iconic quality of the original and the addition of clothes in no way fools us that it's because the budget didn't run to a full body-suit. In fact, it reminds us of Tor Johnson for some reason. But to be honest, it just isn't as much fun as the others. Revenge of the Creature (1955) was saved by scenes like Gilly trashing a jazz gig at a waterside bar (one of our favourite moments in the genre) but there's no particularly outstanding "moment" this time out. Jeff Morrow and Rex Reason (real name, we think), reprising their *This Island Earth* (1955) partnership, are good value as ever, but this is still the weakest of the trilogy despite the lofty intentions of the story. But despite our criticisms, it is still fairly enjoyable. Probably down to the *Bigger Boat* and the swimwear.

Extras: Trailer / Lobby card gallery / Poster gallery / Stills gallery

JOHN KNOTT



7



LA GRANDE BOUFFE (1973)

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: MARCO FERRERI / SCREENPLAY: MARCO FERRERI, RAFAEL AZCONA, FRANCIS BLANCHE / STARRING: MARCELLO MASTROIANNI, MICHEL PICCOLI, UGO TOGNAZZI, PHILIPPE NOIRET, ANDRÉA FERRÉOL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Once again, the brilliant Arrow Films have taken an old favourite and given it a souped-up, cleaned-up, extras-filled Blu-ray release. This time, the film in question is Marco Ferreri's 1973 mildly dark comedy, *La Grande Bouffe*.

In terms of plot, the film finds four long-standing friends take up residence in a country mansion. The simple aim of the game is to gorge themselves on as much food as possible... well, until they also decide to

add some female company into the mix. As such, three whores and a teacher end up at this party of excess and decadence, but maybe all in question have bitten off more than they can chew.

The end result of *La Grande Bouffe* is seemingly what you'd get if you plonked a couple of *Carry On* movies, a few *Confessions of a...* movies and a large dollop of European arthouse in a blender and hit full speed for just over 2 hours.

Despite the odd premise and risqué sexual element, there are actually plenty of laugh-out-loud moments dotted throughout *La Grande Bouffe*'s runtime. Particular humour comes from the sexed-up Marcello, with his smutty tone remiss of a French Sid James (or even our very own Assistant Editor, Martin), although all involved in this feast of overindulgence get their moments to shine in equal measure.

Somewhere buried within the plot of food and sex, Ferreri's film does have some semblance of irony and, dare we say, meaning. As the sounds-good-on-paper plan of indulgence begins to spiral out of control, there is a clear message of overdoing things, with each person's particular vices coming back to bite them on the proverbial backside.

The style and shooting of *La Grande Bouffe* is as lavish and as full of colour as its exquisite dining tables, and the film gushes vibrancy, character and detail at every corner. Holding it all together is our central foursome (all using their real first names for their characters – Marcello Mastroianni, Michel Piccoli,

Ugo Tognazzi and Philippe Noiret), as all have their little quirks and differing characterisations that slowly start to unravel throughout the film. Then there's Andrea Ferreol as the apparent delicate flower of a school teacher who it soon becomes clear is up for arguably even more of a good time than anyone else involved in this plentiful party of profligacy.

As ever with these recent Arrow releases, we've got a crisp, enhanced new transfer of the film, which adds even further to its charm. Yes, it might be mad as a box of frogs at times, but *La Grande Bouffe* is a tasty offering in bizarre-but-brilliant cinema.

Extras: *The Farcical Movie* feature on Marco Ferreri / *Behind-the-scenes* footage with cast and crew interviews / *Extracts from Couleurs autour d'un festival* with cast and crew interviews / *Selected scene commentary* / *News report from Cannes Film Festival* / *Visual essay* / *Trailer* / *Collector's booklet*

ANDREW POLLARD



8



ZOMBIE FIGHT CLUB

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JOE CHIEN / STARRING: ANDY ON, JESSICA CAMBENSY, MICHAEL WONG, TERENCE YIN, JACK KAO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Imagine a dark, gloomy back street full of tired Grindhouse theatres. Imagine the gutter running in front of these dilapidated pillars of nostalgia, full of the overflowing filth from the scarcely populated cinemas and the detritus discarded by staff and patrons as too questionable even for their tastes. Floating amongst this unwanted unpleasantness is where you'd find Joe Chien's *Zombie Fight Club*, the latest film from a director determined

to offend with excessive levels of flesh and violence, but who in truth warrants only a tired sigh.

The plot of this film, if it can indeed be called such, relies entirely on casting an envious look at 30 years' worth of cinema and sampling the best parts without homage, awareness or even a hint of guilt. There are clear references to *The Raid*, to *Braindead*, to *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. Nods to *Gladiator* and *Romero's* zombie

back catalogue are frequent, with the titular *Fight Club* only getting scant attention in a final third that bears no real connection to what has gone before. Instead of moulding a narrative that makes any kind of sense at all, Chien has instead chosen to populate his film with as much blood and boobs as possible. Scarcely a scene passes in the opening third without an act of violent, often uncomfortably voyeuristic sex or over-the-top gory violence that tries to intimidate its audience but simply, slightly tragically, just bores.

The two leads, Andy On and Jessica C, clearly cast solely for their looks, are at least better at the acting lark than the majority of the cast, who fortunately never actually last too long. Andy's story shadows that of Rama from *The Raid*, only with less convincing fighting, and as for Jessica, well, she just screams a lot. Presumably that is down to the tragedy of the script rather than being actually required by it; there is reference to sinister under-age sex in Chien's film alongside scenes so distasteful in tone as to push the boundaries of what is truly acceptable.

Strangely, surprisingly and as frustrating as anything else to be discovered lurking in *Zombie Fight Club*, Chien clearly has talent. The visual effects are at times hugely impressive and there are moments, however misguided they might be in practice, which theoretically hint at a filmmaker with an eye for how to frame a scene. Some of the set pieces, in particular the ill-fated fight club, are striking in their visuals, but so few and far between are these moments of clarity that they are easily forgotten amidst the bottom-of-the-barrel scrapings that make up the majority of the film.

Zombie Fight Club is a film with a violent, distasteful sensibility that tries to provoke its audience through shock and awe but ultimately is just an unpleasant journey through an alley of grubby titillation. If Chien could only find a way out of the gutter and focus on what he actually does well, then it would be interesting to see what he comes up with. For now, as much as your interest might be piqued by his latest feature, avoid *Zombie Fight Club* at all costs.

JOHN TOWNSEND

+++++ 2



WIND WALKERS

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: RUSSELL FRIEDENBERG / STARRING: GLEN POWELL, RUDY YOUNGBLOOD, ZANE HOLTZ / RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 21ST

The opening monologue of Russell Friedenberg's new feature tells of an ancient Native American curse; that of the *Wind Walker*. The legend describes a supernatural force that waits in the shadows to claim those who have fought in lands to which they do not belong, striking them down upon their return and consigning their souls to the wind. Any hopeful optimism generated by this intriguing set up disappointingly becomes lost as the film stumbles along in the second half, at times becoming as lost as the

characters themselves.

With one of their own missing, a group of friends head into the wild to hunt, but their strained relationships quickly come to the fore as they come under attack from an unknown assailant. As their fear grows, suspicion falls upon one of their number, the recently returned army veteran and borderline schizophrenic Kotz (Holtz), but as the bodies mount up it becomes clear something much more evil is stalking them.

There is an intriguing, haunting supernatural thriller

at the heart of Friedenberg's everglade-set anti-war film but finding it almost becomes part of the mystery itself as too many genre and subgenre references are randomly thrown together. For much of the film, a ghostly protagonist is alluded to, which provides much of the early interest, but in the final act this is forgotten to concentrate instead on some kind of zombie/vampire hybrid that is running around infecting as many people as possible, curiously with the intention of building an army. The purpose of this carnivorous recruitment is never fully explained and despite regular news bulletins reporting this as a global issue rather than just a Florida-based one, presenting a World War Z-type scenario, this subplot also fades away pretty quickly.

The unpredictable abruptness in the switch of genres is reflected in the narrative itself. The direction and editing do little to aid a story that feels awkwardly disjointed, with numerous seemingly unconnected events. Characters buddy up and fall out repeatedly, flashbacks give

some apparent history of the "infection" without ever offering an adequate explanation of its source and random scenes appear to be lifted directly from other films. The cast do their best amidst the confusion but struggle to instil any real depth or understandable motive into their characters, as lifelong relationships are quickly discarded when a bloodthirsty survival instinct takes hold.

Instead of the tension-filled horror Friedenberg was clearly aiming for, his film sadly descends into a routine thriller with a straight-to-DVD feel about it. You want to like it more, you want to applaud the ambition and then revel in the horror, but ultimately, nothing quite holds together cohesively. Whether this is down to the script, editing issues, budgetary restraints or something else altogether, *Wind Walkers* just doesn't feel finished, something reflected in an ending that feels hurried and last minute.

JOHN TOWNSEND

+++++ 5



THE HOURGLASS SANATORIUM (1973)

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: WOZCIECH HAS / STARRING: JAN NOWICKI, TADEUSZ KONDRAT, GUSTAW HOLOUBEK, IRENA ORSKA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Hourglass Sanatorium from Polish pioneer Wozciech Has [based on a collection of short stories by Bruno Schulz] boasts a pretty interesting story behind its initial reception. As it happens, the Soviet Communist Polish government of the time weren't too keen on the film's subtle criticism of post-war Poland, not to mention the depiction of Jewish traditions and characters when the country was under an overt period of enforced anti-Semitism. In fact, the authorities were so unhappy that they attempted to prohibit the film's entry into

the 1973 Cannes Film Festival. Fortunately, art prevailed and the picture was covertly smuggled into the festival where it went on to rightly receive the Special Jury Prize. That could almost be a film in itself, couldn't it? Any budding scriptwriters take note (but we want a cut of the profits).

The film itself opens with a young man named Józef (Jan Nowicki) riding a ramshackle old train en route to visit his father (Tadeusz Kondrat). As the rickety train comes to a halt, Józef is ushered by an unsettling, glassy-eyed conductor to make his way through a graveyard and up to

the titular Sanatorium. Inside the grandiose-yet-dilapidated gothic institution, he encounters the ominous Dr. Gotard (Gustaw Holoubek), who informs him that his father has died in the real world. However, within the Sanatorium, he remains alive. As the plot progresses, it is revealed that the Sanatorium is a peculiar temporal enigma where one can experience distorted memories and dreams, as Dr. Gotard explains, "*Here we reactivate time with all its possibilities.*"

What follows is a psychotropic, oneiric trip through Józef's memories, his dreams and his subconscious in a series of interconnected yet often wholly unrelated passages that reunite Józef with his mother, explore his Jewish upbringing and revel in his father's passion for birds and aviary. One particularly eldritch scene sees Józef run into a bunch of animate, historical mannequins, including Thomas Edison and Alfred Dreyfus, who re-enact the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. One acutely disconcerting aspect of this extract is trying to decipher which mannequins are actually portrayed by actors and which are merely props.

Paradoxical and stimulating

as the narrative is, perhaps the true triumph of the film lies in the mise-en-scène and the cinematography by Witold Sobociński. Beautifully restored by Mr Bongo for this Blu-ray release, the visual artistry is striking. Throughout the film, the sky changes from peach, to blue, to grey and the lighting shifts from being ominous, shadowy and macabre at one point to hallucinatory and alluring the next, all in a seamless and graceful manner.

The Hourglass Sanatorium is a work with a startling amalgamation of conventions from Gothicism, to horror, to fantasy, but most importantly Has' film is irrefutably a surrealist masterpiece and has in turn attracted admirers from Buñuel to Gilliam. Wojciech Has may not be as well renowned as his Polish compatriot Polanski, but his work deserves the upmost recognition, and with The Hourglass Sanatorium he created a poetic, hypnagogic work that elegantly explores themes of time, mortality, family and memory.

FORD MADDOX BROWN

+++++ 9



JOHN WICK

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: CHAD STAHLESKI / SCREENPLAY: DEREK KOLSTAD / STARRING: KEANU REEVES, MICHAEL NYQVIST, ALFIE ALLEN, ADRIANNE PALICKI, WILLEM DAFÖE / RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 21ST

From the look of posters and DVD/Blu-ray covers, you might expect John Wick to be a naff B-movie, but the film is both surprisingly and immensely enjoyable on many different levels. It achieves in restoring Keanu Reeves' reputation as an A-list movie star, and deservedly so since in recent years he had starred in numerous terrible movies like 47 Ronin and the remake of The Day The Earth

Stood Still. He has a presence and a gravitas to him, and this film reminds you how brilliant a movie star he was in films like My Own Private Idaho, Speed, Point Break and The Matrix, having an unreadable quality that makes you want to look at him and spend your time with him.

Set within the revenge thriller genre, John Wick is different from most films within that canon, even though it's been loosely

grouped with those, because the reason for the revenge is incredibly elemental it's almost absurd. The character of John Wick is basically tearing New York down, ripping the criminal underworld apart and killing all these gangsters, because they killed his dog, yet the dog meant so much more to him since it was the only thing of his wife left. So, it's absolutely nothing like Taken where Liam Neeson goes to Europe to get his daughter back by killing everyone he meets, and even though the movie is absurdist and insane, it's very basic and straightforward. It also has some emotional weight to it, particularly during the scene where the dog dies because it's played completely straight and you're convinced by Wick's motivations and reasons for exacting revenge.

The mood and the atmosphere is brilliantly captured, and almost has flashes of Newton Thomas Sigel's cinematography in Nicholas Winding Refn's Drive in the way it looks at the city with its dark alleyways and neon-lit streets, making you almost feel like you are in New York. The action set-

pieces are well-choreographed and very balletic in its approach to fighting and gunplay, harking back to the great works of both John Woo and Hong Kong cinema. In this film, you do feel the pain, the batterings and the carnage that's happening on screen, and it keeps you on the edge of your seat all the way through. The performances are pretty much solid, with Michael Nyqvist chewing the scenery as the terrifying mob boss and Adrianne Palicki kicking ass as the sultry villainess. It's a shame that Willem Daföe, John Leguizamo and Ian McShane are reduced to glorified cameos, but when they come into play, they make the most from small roles.

It's become debatable as to whether or not the action genre was becoming old and stale, but John Wick proves that, not only is there more life to the genre than one expected, but you could approach the genre in a new light. It's entertaining, frenetic, exciting, and a real return to form for Keanu Reeves.

RYAN POLLARD

+++++ 8



FINAL GIRL

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TYLER SHIELDS / SCREENPLAY: ADAM PRINCE / STARRING: ABIGAIL BRESLIN, WES BENTLEY, ALEXANDER LUDWIG, LOGAN HUFFMAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Directed by Tyler Shields, *Final Girl* is about a girl named Veronica (Abigail Breslin) who has been trained by her mentor, William (Wes Bentley), to be a complete lethal weapon. At the age of eighteen, she is tasked by William to kill a group of sadistic senior boys who enjoy hunting and murdering women. Becoming the next victim, Veronica allows herself

to be lured into the woods by the killers, but it's here that the games begin and that the hunters become the hunted.

With *Final Girl*, the filmmakers are basically taking the Hit-Girl trope to the slasher genre, much like how Hanna used that concept to approach the action thriller genre. It's an elegant change of pace for the genre, even if the film devolves into a predictable narrative you

could easily see coming from a mile away. In a way, it lacks the surprise and shock-value of Adam Wingard's 2013 horror-revitaliser *You're Next*, which, like *Final Girl*, was made on a small budget yet produced excellent results.

The film starts out unexpectedly, dripping with atmosphere with Wes Bentley testing the young Veronica with mind puzzles just after her parents died before flashing forward to when Veronica became Abigail Breslin and is ready for her first assassination assignment. These opening minutes are fresh and the most exciting part of the film, and while the film occasionally reaches those levels later on, the rest feels like the traditional slasher trademarks being recycled and reused with a unique dynamic thrown in here and there.

Final Girl has great ideas up its sleeve, but they are never fully realised to their true potential, partially because the direction is completely lifeless and the pacing will prove to be too slow and tiring for even the

average viewer. That's not to say it isn't enjoyable while it's there, as the film does offer its fair share of entertainment and thrills, particularly once the action heats up in the final act. Abigail Breslin gives a perfectly mercurial performance as the in-control mini-assassin, Wes Bentley is remarkably solid in the few minutes of screen time he receives, and Alexander Ludwig is suitably reptilian and chilly as the main killer, feeling almost like an extension of his baddie role in the first *Hunger Games* movie.

As one would expect from such a solid cast, the acting is first rate and there are some pleasures to be found in this twist on the slasher genre. Yet, the great ideas are never fully realised and the film ends up falling short as a result. Also, with its mediocre direction and lacklustre editing, *Final Girl* ends up being less impressive than the sum of its parts.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★ 6



THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUN (1983)

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: DAVID ASKEY / SCREENPLAY: MICHAEL J. BIRD / STARRING: PATRICK MOWER, PETER EGAN, EMILY RICHARD, CHRISTOPHER SCOLAR / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When photojournalist Don Tierney (Patrick Mower, playing a character inspired by real-life war photographer Don McCullin perhaps?) reluctantly accepts a travelogue assignment on the Greek island of Rhodes, he becomes fascinated by the medieval castle that overlooks the town, but when he breaks into the castle after dark, Tierney is killed by something far nastier than curiosity. Still trying to reconcile herself to his death, Tierney's widow Anne (Emily Richard) travels to the island and not only discovers her own awakening psychic powers but also unlocks the terrible secret of what destroyed her husband, a

secret wrapped up in the Knights Templar, deals with the Devil and a mysterious French Count called Lavalliere (Peter Egan) with a centuries-old past.

It's very good to see *The Dark Side of the Sun* arrive on DVD. Made at a time when the BBC still allowed people with an imagination to write the occasional script (courtesy of *Who Pays the Ferryman* scribe Michael J. Bird), it was obviously given a sizeable budget; there is plenty of location work, some impressive set design, and despite the occasional costume faux-pas (most of Mower's wardrobe) and Emily Richard's

distractingly weird hairstyle, the series has barely aged at all.

True, the story itself is probably more convoluted than it should be – although this isn't remotely a vampire story, there are undoubtedly shades of *Dracula* in Lavalliere, including a *Dracula*/*Mina*-type reincarnation subplot that feels a bit tacked-on and unnecessary. And, as expected for a 1980s-era TV serial, the few special effects (brief flashing images of a demonic mask and ropey multiple *The Dark Side of the Sun*, overlays of Lavalliere's victims shaking their heads and screaming) detract from rather than add to the tension, although there is an impressive man-on-fire moment in one of the later episodes.

The cast are all outstanding – Emily Richard starts off a little wet and unsympathetic as Anne but becomes steelier and more likable as the story continues, Peter Egan glowers beautifully and occasionally seems to channel Julian Glover's character in *City of Death* (sadly without Catherine Schell to accompany him) and even Patrick Mower puts in a halfway decent performance although, after making *Incense for the Damned* (aka *Bloodsuckers*) a decade earlier,

he was no stranger to horror in the Greek Isles. Supporting actors Christopher Scoular, as the friend who just happens to have the academic connections to find out more about Lavalliere, and Betty Arvaniti, as the psychiatrist/medium who helps Anne come to terms with her psychic abilities, also deserve a big mention.

As for *Eureka*'s two-disc DVD, *The Dark Side of the Sun* looks exactly as it did when it first aired on TV more than thirty years ago. The picture is soft (there is an obvious and sometimes jarring discrepancy between the sunlit locations and the flatly-lit studio interiors) but the audio is clear (Stavros Xarhakos' music is particularly good) and in our opinion the series still holds up so much better than other occult/supernaturally-themed shows of that period (i.e. *The Omega Factor*, which has dated horribly).

All in all, this is an engrossing, intelligent and atmospheric piece of storytelling you really shouldn't miss. So watch it now, before some talentless hack decides that it's due for a remake.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★ 9



KULL THE CONQUEROR (1997)

DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: JOHN NICOLELLA / SCREENPLAY: CHARLES EDWARD POGUE / STARRING: KEVIN SORBO, TIA CARRERE, THOMAS IAN GRIFFITH, GARY "LITEFOOT" DAVIS, KARINA LOMBARD, EDWARD TUDOR-POLE, DOUGLAS HENSHALL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Originally intended as the third Conan film, and primarily based upon Robert E. Howard's novel *The Hour of the Dragon*, *Kull the Conqueror* was eventually reworked for another of Howard's characters after Arnold Schwarzenegger decided his swords and sorcery days were behind him and replacement star Kevin Sorbo expressed his reluctance to reprise someone else's role. Eighteen years later, the De Laurentiis production is finally

taking its UK DVD bow, having missed out initially by appearing just before the new format was launched. With sand and sandalry undergoing something of a renaissance, the timing couldn't be better.

This is the genre at its unreconstructed best. Unencumbered by the portentous heaviness of touch that plagued John Milius' original *Conan the Barbarian*, *Kull the Conqueror* whips along at a great pace, rarely more than

a couple of minutes passing by without weapons being drawn. Made heir to the throne of Valusia by a spiteful departing king, Kull must contend not only with the aspirations of a pair of cousins who consider the realm rightfully theirs, but also with revived sorceress Aikavasha, who plans to restore the ancient evil kingdom of Acheron, upon the ruins of which Valusia was originally built. After being seduced into marriage by the reincarnated demon queen (who stops shy of killing him after realising what a great lover he is), Kull must travel north in an attempt to acquire the breath of the god Volka, the only thing which can counteract her witchcraft.

Sorbo makes a far more charismatic screen presence than his predecessor Schwarzenegger (best line: "She told me she was nineteen!"), playing Kull with a twinkle and a grin, while of his two brides Tia Carrere is an effectively venomous resurrected sorceress and Karina Lombard striking but glacial as the soothsaying Zareta. The rest of the cast are by turns stern and theatrical, but always

enjoyable, while the plot is as absurd and as exaggerated as could be desired.

Something of a failure on release, having arrived after the genre had long gone out of fashion and action movies had adopted a more affected attitude, this release arrives just as *Kull the Conqueror* is ripe for reappraisal. And in spite of some occasionally iffy effects, and the sword fighting perhaps feeling a little pedestrian to modern eyes – especially after *The Matrix* changed the rules for cinematic action – this is actually terrific if undemanding entertainment.

There's no swearing and no nudity, just an old-fashioned game of throne-swapping with plenty of corny dialogue and arch characterisation, and more packed into its 95 minutes than many modern films will manage in nearly twice as long. If competing mullets and moderately convincing monsters are your bag, this is tremendous fun.

Extras: Photo gallery

J.R.SOUTHALL

+++++ 7



PARKS AND RECREATION: THE COMPLETE SERIES

DVD / CERT: 15 / CREATORS: GREG DANIELS, MICHAEL SCHUR / STARRING: AMY POEHLER, JIM O'HEIR, NICK OFFERMAN, AUBREY PLAZA, CHRIS PRATT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Looking back now, some six years later, to when *Parks and Recreation* first hit our screens, it's easy to forget that it didn't drop into our lives like a sleek comedy missile but was, instead, met with some criticism, occasionally missing its target and not quite sure of itself.

After all, visionary creators Greg Daniels and Michael Schur, with their already impressive canon of work including *The Simpsons* and

The Office, were taking a massive punt on a premise that doesn't automatically suggest great comedic potential, namely the machinations of an inconsequential small-town's under-budgeted and underwhelming *Parks and Recreation* department. By the second season, however, the show had finely tuned its trajectory and set a course for award-winning accolade and timeless cult status thanks, in

no small part, to its fabulous characters and the collaborative writing of its ensemble cast.

Of all the characters in the show, the real stand-out performances and unforgettable moments have to be those of Nick Offerman's good old-fashioned curmudgeon, Ron Swanson. Swanson is to *Parks and Rec*' what Homer is to *The Simpsons* in that neither were intended to be the main character but have become, nonetheless, one of the reasons we watch their respective shows (*Simpsons*' creators maintain that the cartoon was always intended to be primarily about Bart and that Homer's popularity was largely unplanned). Ron Swanson's gruff, objectionable attitude to mostly everything would be lost, however, were it not parried by the star of the show Amy Poehler's irrepressibly optimistic and cajoling officiate Leslie Knope. There simply isn't space to mention every cast member's contribution but suffice to say that from Rob Lowe's overly-perky, health-obsessed government official, to the office loser Gerry Gergich played by Jim O'Heir, there isn't a single weak link in the endless

comedy chain. It is worth mentioning that Chris Pratt is much more likeable as the slightly podgy, clumsy chump Andy Dwyer than the buff all-action-hero of *Jurassic World*.

As for the box set itself, it is rather plainly packaged for such a momentous show and, frankly, boasts a hefty price tag but it is nice to see the conventional use of seven separate boxes (one for each season) rather than, for example, a recent release of the *Modern Family* box set with 17 discs crammed confusingly into one case. The extras are exhaustive and no matter who your favourite character is there will be something here to add to their body of work. If you need to have the absolutely definitive collection of what has become an almost legendary show, then this is just the thing for you.

Extras: Deleted scenes / Gag Reels / Music Video / Webisodes / Commentaries / Feature on the 100th Episode and more.

SIMON BESSON

+++++ 9

THE LATEST NEWS
FROM THE WORLD OF
AUDIO ADVENTURES
BY TONY JONES

AUDIOSTATIC



THE COMING OF THE MARTIANS

Great news for fans of H. G. Wells and the audio work of Martin Johnson's Everybodyelse Productions. Their Kickstarter has broken its target ahead of schedule, meaning we will get **The Coming of the Martians**, their cinematic, full-cast production of **The War of the Worlds** novel. Martin had this to say:

"We're delighted to have so many fans of the original novel helping to fund our exciting project and send huge thanks to all of our wonderful backers on Kickstarter. Lisa, Nick and I are now working hard to produce something truly amazing, and most importantly... faithful."

DOCTOR WHO

The BBC continues full steam-ahead with its audiobook releases and is mainly paralleling its **Doctor Who** novels with accompanying audiobooks. October, however, will see the George Mann story **The House of Winter** appear on audio, the first of four to be published exclusively on audio and released in the run up to Christmas.

BIG BANG GENERATION

Paul Cornell has let slip that the new Gary Russell Twelfth Doctor novel **Big Bang Generation** will include the classic character Bernice Summerfield. Bernice has long been played by Lisa Bowerman for Big Finish (on dozens of titles) and we also learned that Lisa will be reading the audiobook of **Big Bang Generation**.

THE OMEGA FACTOR

Big Finish also announced there will be (at least) one more boxset for **The Omega Factor** (see last month's feature article for all the background to this stunning drama) though no news yet on writers. We do get to hear the return of Louise Jameson, John Dorney and Natasha Gerson, though.

STRANGENESS IN SPACE

Now an update on last month's crowdfunding news. The **Strangeness in Space** team have managed to secure their episode two funding. As is the way of crowdfunding, some of the funds pledged for episode one didn't materialise so there was a small shortfall. All things being well, this should still go into post-production in the next month and be available soon. As to

the episode itself, it will be called **Five**, and has a host of cameos and guests including: Rufus Hound as Atrocious Knocious, Peter Guinness as Dr Scarifium and even Carol Cleveland (**Monty Python's Flying Circus**) making an appearance.

PATHFINDER LEGENDS

In other Big Finish news, their partnership with Pazio continues, and September will see the first release of six for their new **Pathfinder Legends** series, based on the RPG of the same name. The second series goes by the name **Mummy's Mask**. The first episode will be **The Half-Dead City** by Cavan Scott from a story by Jim Groves.

HAUNTED

The BBC is also busy with a three-week run of supernatural stories under the banner of **Haunted**. Most of these should still be available to those in the UK via the iPlayer radio app. Whatever your tastes, there should be something of interest including: Wilkie Collins' **The Dream Woman**, Rosemary Timperley's **Little Girl Lost**, **The Judge's House** by Bram Stoker, **The Inexperienced Ghost** by H. G. Wells, and Ray Bradbury's **The Emissary**.

BIG FINISH WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

DOCTOR WHO: THE EARLY ADVENTURES 2.01 THE YES MEN

The Second Doctor is the focus of this next batch of 'new old' stories, taking the characters from the Troughton-era and giving them fresh adventures. Original companions Anneke Wills and Frazer Hines revisit their roles, with the latter also voicing the Time Lord.

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 30th

+++

THIS IS COLIN BAKER

A unique 2-CD set featuring an in-depth interview with the Sixth Doctor, covering all aspects of his career. Always an entertaining character, this will be a fascinating listen.

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 30th

+++

THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

We all know this story, surely? Well now the perennial favourite has been turned into a full-blooded audio drama featuring appearances from Doctor Who's Dan Starkey and Jacqueline King.

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 30th

+++

BLAKE'S 7 MEDIASPHERE

The latest adventure for the crew of the *Liberator* takes them to the Federation's propaganda-spewing space station. Surely nothing could possibly go wrong there?

AVAILABLE SEPTEMBER 30th

To order, or for more information, head over to bigfinish.com

REVIEWS

THE LATEST AUDIO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



DARK SHADOWS: DELIVER US FROM EVIL

AUTHOR: AARON LAMONT / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / STARRING: CHRISTOPHER PENNOCK, LISA RICHARDS, SIMON KENT, BRIGID LOHREY, JAMES UNSWORTH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's Christmas Eve in Collinsport and the Son of the Dark Lord, who resides in Cyrus Longworth's head, plans on starting the apocalypse that will create a Hell on earth. In order to accomplish this, he

needs a new body and Alfie Chapman, a psychopathic British tourist, has been chosen as the new vessel. However, Cyrus and Sabrina Jennings, who became a werewolf on her wedding night and killed her husband, have plans to stop the Son of the Dark Lord achieving his goal.

As with all Big Finish productions, *Dark Shadows: Deliver Us from Evil* is a lavish sonic affair chock full of immersive sound effects and an original score. Writer Aaron Lamont has created a suitably chilling drama, and we can't help but wonder if the character of Alfie Chapman is a homage to Mark Lewis from Michael Powell's classic horror film *Peeping Tom*, who enjoyed filming his victims' terror before killing them. Similarly, Alfie likes to capture his victims' demise with a Polaroid camera as he slides a knife into them.

Simon Kent, who sounds astonishingly like Paul McGann, offers a creepy portrayal of a serial killer who takes pride in what he does as he hopes to be remembered with the likes of Jack the Ripper and Charles Manson. Accompanying Alfie is his girlfriend Emma, who is possessed by the spirit of the mad French murderess Danielle Rogert. And if that sounds crazy, well, there's a whole lot more craziness that ensues as this tale

unfolds. There are spirits and entities jumping bodies, the aforementioned serial killing, and just about every character seems to double cross each other.

This is definitely something you have to concentrate on and not have on in the background whilst ironing, as it is so easy to lose who is possessing who.

The score cleverly uses snatches of familiar Christmas tunes but it's the score that is also this production's biggest problem as it is almost constant throughout the seventy-minute running time. It has a jarring effect of knocking you out of the narrative so that you focus on the music and not the dialogue, which is crucial in order to be able to follow proceedings.

One other stumbling block would be that casual followers or newcomers to this series might feel utterly lost, so some knowledge of previous stories would be greatly advantageous.

That being said, this is a dark tale perfect for the Yuletide season, with some delicious scene-chewing performances worthy of its small screen daytime soap opera forebear.

CHRISTIAN JONES



7



NOT OF THIS EARTH (1988) **COMPOSER: CHUCK CIRINO / LABEL: TERROR VISION / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

What with Waxwork's release of *Chopping Mall*, and now *Terror Vision* putting out *Not of This Earth*, could some light finally be getting cast on Chuck Cirino? The man's never gotten the fan service the likes of which were granted to his '80s synthesiser peers, even though Cirino's music makes just as effective use of minimal instrumentation.

A solid part of that may be due to the fact that while Cirino's scores are minimal and creepy, they're not usually for high-profile films. The man's done an awful lot of Syfy films, and despite the perfection in *Not of This Earth*, *Chopping Mall*, and even *Return of Swamp Thing* or *976-EVIL II*, it's difficult to mention that the composer has also done films like *Camel Spiders* or *MegaConda*.

Cirino, despite working all of this on a synthesiser, does an effective job of keeping *Not of This Earth*'s score from being purely science fiction. Using elements of Morricone's spaghetti western work, as well as the finest pipe-organ classic horror, mixed with the expected '80s synthesiser chords, the composer keeps the music fresh and interesting.

The main title theme introduces a melody that Cirino will revisit throughout his score – it's creepy and very otherworldly, but also just tags the very tail end of '80s new wave dance. *Coming Home/Scruffy* reworks the theme in an even more minor key, adding in mellotron waves and pounding kettle drums to drive home the disturbing nature, while *Nadine's Basement Trip* goes a different route, phasing everything into a wash before layering a very Morricone-esque sparse guitar over it.

A *Pound of Flesh* and *Driving Mr. Johnson* do an excellent job of showing off what Cirino really does best, however. These two tracks present the composer's knack for high-energy chase music. The former builds, falls, and rises several times as it goes along, dramatically ratcheting the tension with each iteration, whereas the latter is a chase theme of classic components. The high end that taps along in the background, like a ticking clock, along with a throbbing bassline – absolutely stellar stuff.

The *Terror Rhapsody* might be the album's highlight. It's disturbing, slightly chintzy, and uses a theremin to really up the tension before it goes into a pipe organ solo, which in turn crescendos into a bass-laden synthesiser. For a piece that's less than two minutes in length, it really pulls out all the stops, and one wishes it was longer.

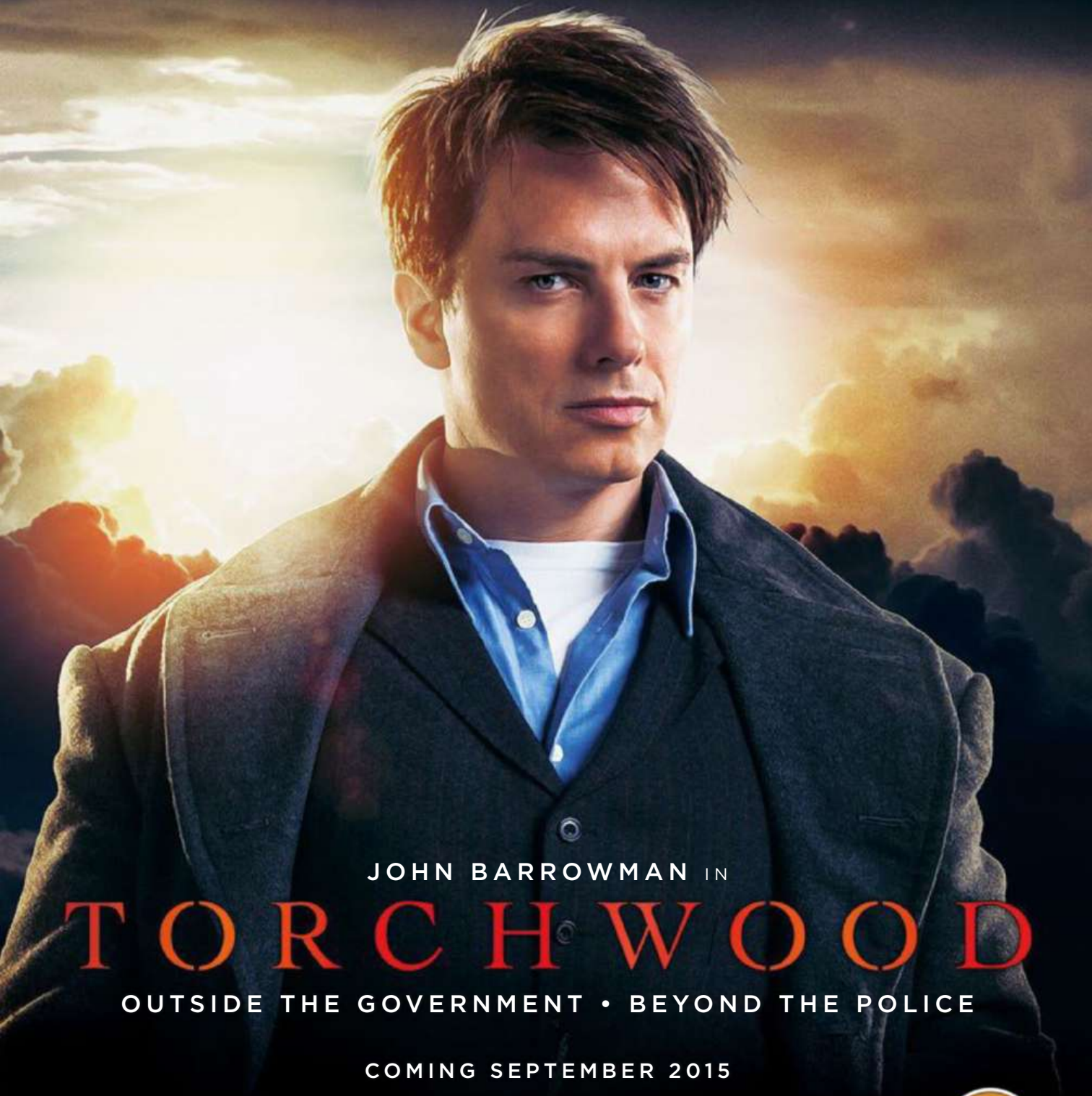
All told, this is exactly the score every fan of '80s sci-fi could hope for, and it's wonderful that *Terror Vision* has seen fit to get it properly released.

NICK SPACEK



8

BRAND NEW FULL-CAST AUDIO ADVENTURES



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OST

THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK



Harry Potter is coming to vinyl LP starting this month! Music On Vinyl's At the Movies imprint is releasing both Parts One and Two of Oscar-winning composer Alexandre Desplat's **Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows** score on two double vinyl LPs. This marks the first appearance of any of the **Harry Potter** scores on vinyl. The double album of Part One saw release at the end of last month on 180-gram green marbled vinyl. It's very He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named, while Part Two is on black and blue smokey transparent wax, which has a certain eldritch quality to it, as well. Part Two is out at the end of this month, and as each edition is limited to 1000, expect them to go rather quickly.

Only the news of **Harry Potter** LPs could knock the news of an **Army of Darkness** vinyl release to second place. Yes, Mondo continues its march of amazing records with the announcement that Joseph LoDuca's **Army of Darkness** will debut at this year's MondoCon in Austin, Texas, next month. Obviously, the LP release will also include Danny

Elfman's *March of the Dead* theme. For those unable to attend MondoCon, you'll miss out on the limited edition of 1000 on baby blue and black vortex swirl. However, Mondo's new thing is that everything they release will eventually be available in a retail edition, meaning you can get your hands on a copy somehow, even if it's not quite as fancy.

As if that wasn't enough news regarding our unlikely hero Ash, Waxwork Records announced that they'll have LoDuca's **Evil Dead 2** score. In an unusual twist of events, the packaging for the release will all be determined via online poll. Voters will get to pick the cover artist, vinyl cover, and even contribute to the liner notes. Given the absolute fan frenzy that's going to accompany this, why not give them a chance to have a say? We won't see this one until 2016, but given that it's been out of print on any format since 1987, a few more months' wait won't hurt.

In further Waxwork news, the label announced via Instagram that they'll be dipping into Stuart Gordon's H. P. Lovecraft films once again with an

upcoming release of Richard Band's score to **From Beyond**. The score was originally put out via Enigma Records in 1986, along with an expanded release on CD from La-La Land in 2003, but given Waxwork's penchant for wanting to discover every bit of extra material, I'm sure we can anticipate something special. There's no release date or other details as of yet.

Also from Instagram comes news from **Turbo Kid**'s cinematographer Jean-Philippe Bernier that they finished the final mix of the score, meaning Le Matos' fantastic danceable music for the '80s throwback will soon be available as a double LP from Death Waltz Recording Company. No news as to when the Montreal duo's music officially releases, but if you can't wait, *The Rise of Turbo Kid* can be downloaded on their *58 minutes pour vivre* EP.

For further Band music, Perseverance Records has another excellent compact disc release available now. It's the composer's work for the Full Moon Pictures' **Castle Freak**, which was also directed by Stuart Gordon, and is also based on a work by Lovecraft. If you've gotten your hands on Perseverance's **The Pit and the Pendulum** CD, you know what fantastically complete editions they can put out, and how the amazing liner notes are worth the purchase price alone.

Lunaris Records' **Night of the Demons** finally went up for pre-order last month, and should be shipping right around the time you're reading this. There are five different double vinyl LP variants for the Dennis Michael Tenney score, with three on 180-gram vinyl, and two on standard weight, with such variants as Sour Ball starburst, red and black marble, transparent red, clear, and black. It's also available on CD and cassette, and all of the versions come with detailed liner notes from director Kevin Tenney. The tracks have all been taken from recently-discovered original reels of the movie, and are taken for those reels' dialogue, music, and effects tracks.

La-La Land has some great releases out now: Frederik Wiedmann's score to the DC Universe animated film, **Justice League: Gods and Monsters**, limited to an edition of 1000. Wiedmann's work in the DC animated universe is quickly becoming something to really listen to. If nothing else, it's worth noting that the composer builds upon his work for previous films as he goes along – **Gods and Monsters'** *Evacuate Metropolis*, for instance, references **Justice League: Throne of**

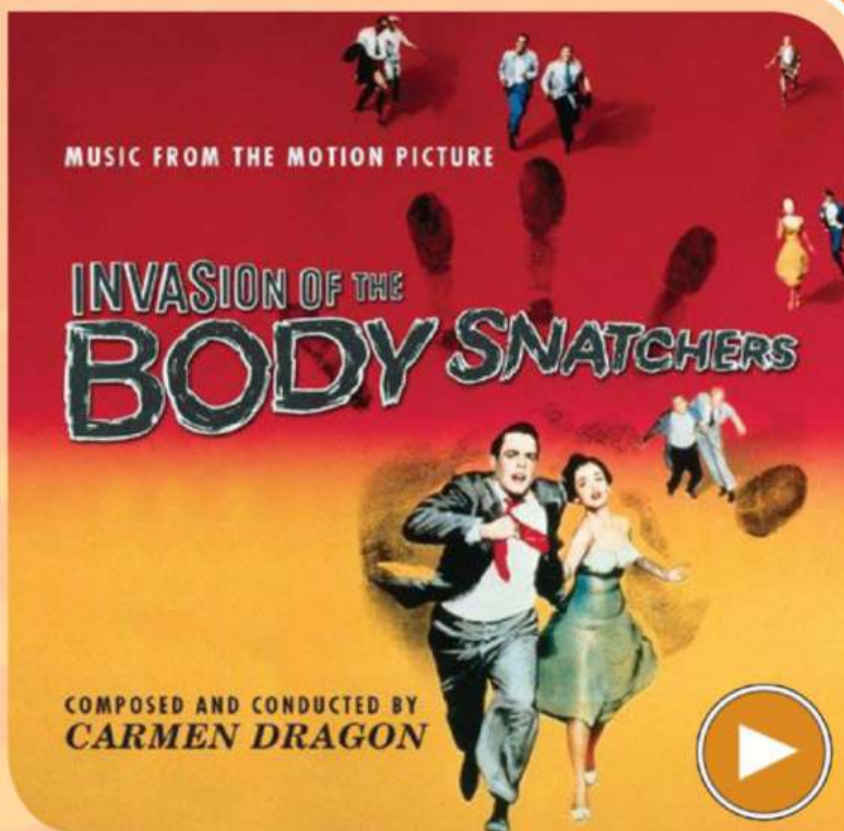
Atlantis' Metropolis. It's wonderful to not only see how DC is world-building, but to also hear it.

Also out from La-La Land is a reissue of Carmen Dragon's 1956 score for the McCarthy-era sci-fi parable **Invasion of the Body Snatchers**. It's an ominous classic, in an edition of 2000, with liner notes from film music historian Jeff Bond, along with the album's co-producer, Dragon's son-in-law Richard Henn. Also included at album's end are three source music tracks, including the '20s Broadway show tune *Crazy Rhythm*, which add a bit of levity and mirth to an otherwise paranoid collection.

Intrada's got the reissue of **The Secret of Nimh** that might finally be the definitive edition. The Jerry Goldsmith score now includes a long-lost cue entitled *At Your Service* – not included on any of the Varèse Sarabande releases – along with three different demo versions of the lullaby *Flying Dreams*. As this is a Special Collection compact disc, quantities are limited. Given that this is such an impressive score from an important composer – to say nothing of the nostalgia this film inspires in geeks of a certain age – we hope you'll be able to give it a listen. It's really a gem.

Gan-Shin Records of Japan has released the score for **Dragon Ball Z: Resurrection 'F'**, the nineteenth instalment in the long-running Japanese **Dragon Ball** series. The score, by composer Norihito Sumitomo, is available worldwide on iTunes, except in Japan, as is Japanese pop idol group Momoiro Clover Z's main theme, entitled *Pledge of Z*. The title track is a combination of metal riffs and pop catchiness (paring nicely with Sumitomo's score), and gets stuck in your head, regardless of your Japanese comprehension skills. The film will be released via FUNimation on DVD and Blu-ray this October.

Silva Screen's vinyl output might seem petite in numbers when compared to their compact disc and digital releases, but each and everything they put out on wax has been gorgeous, both in terms of looks and sound. Be it **Terminator 2** or **Sherlock**, a Silva Screen LP is something to get your hands on. Thus, the fact that they're reissuing Jerry Goldsmith's **Legend** score as a double LP is something



about which to get giddy. The 180-gram black vinyl double LP is the original score to Ridley Scott's 1986 fantasy film, which was notably replaced for the American release of the film by Tangerine Dream. This is the vinyl debut of the label's 2002 re-release, which featured six songs not on the original vinyl issue.

Those who've watched MTV's **Scream** series are no doubt quite familiar with the music played during the episodes, given how a title and artist blurb flash at the bottom of the screen every time a new track starts. Still, much like the alt-rock that soundtracked the original 1996 film, the electronic-inflected pop of the series is a very apt pairing with the teens it depicts. Columbia Records has **Scream: Music from Season One**, a selection of ten songs from the series – a very minor representation of the half-dozen or so that appear in each

episode – available digitally from the likes of Amazon and iTunes.

We feel like we didn't rave enough about John Paesano's score for **The Maze Runner** when it was released last year. The film was a remarkably-involving combination of post-apocalyptic sci-fi action and teen angst, and managed to keep even this aging nerd in rapt attention. A good amount of the appeal is due to Paesano's music, which is both energetic action and intricate twists that reflect the changes of the maze itself. Paesano's score for the second film in the **Maze Runner** franchise, **The Scorch Trials**, comes via Sony Classical this month. While we weren't able to get our hands on the entire thing before press date, what we've heard reflects the dry, punishing heat of the Scorch, and we cannot wait for the entire score – to say nothing of the film itself.



STARBURST



AURAL COMPANIONS AND TIMELINE CROSSOVERS

In a year of milestones for Big Finish (they released their 200th main-range *Doctor Who* title earlier this year), another significant event is approaching. In September, they release *The Conspiracy*, the first in a new series of six *Torchwood* adventures. While *Torchwood* is no stranger to audio (and works well in the medium) this is a big moment for Big Finish – their first release set in the universe of twenty-first century *Doctor Who*.

It is true they released a set of eleven stories, one per then-existing Doctor, in 2013 for the fiftieth anniversary, but they were a joint project with AudioGo (as was). That series was *Destiny of the Doctor* and allowed them to use the vocal talents of Catherine Tate and Jenna Coleman. With *Torchwood*, Big Finish is now producing brand new titles under its own banner.

It didn't stop with *Torchwood*; in recent months there have been several announcements of other modern ranges. Here, we will round them all up in one place

for any fans who might have missed some of the news.

The *Torchwood* range starts with Captain Jack (John Barrowman being directed over Skype) and continues with Ianto Jones (the welcome return of Gareth David-Lloyd). There are four more titles to come; no word yet on casting, but surely Eve Myles must soon follow. We don't know which era of *Torchwood* these are set in, but are promised news soon.

Most recently announced is a crossover between Strax the Sontaran (played by Big Finish regular Dan Starkey) and Jago & Litefoot. If you aren't familiar with all the ranges, there are (to date) nine released box sets of Jago & Litefoot, the Victorian characters from *Talons of Weng-Chiang*. They have also appeared in several other releases. The crossover is *Jago & Litefoot & Strax - The Haunting* and has Strax mistake Jago & Litefoot for Madame Vastra and Jenny. Released in November, the title suggests there could be more, and can the

rest of the Paternoster Gang be far off?

Things move up a gear in January 2016 with the release of *The Churchill Years* and *The Diary of River Song*.

The Churchill Years has Ian McNeice returning as Churchill, with a set of four stories set around World War II and including the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Doctors (though not the actors). It also has a strong supporting cast including Danny Horn (who played the younger Kazran Sardick in *A Christmas Carol*, the 2010 special), Holly Earl (Lily Arwell in the 2011 special *The Doctor, The Widow and the Wardrobe*) and Emily Atack. This is being conceived as a one-off, but it is already clear there is plenty of scope to do more with this, even going back in Churchill's timeline to his earlier exploits.

The obvious fan choice for January is *The Diary of River Song*. This is also a four-disc adventure stretching out over space and time. Most intriguing is the fourth title by Matt Fitton called *The Rulers of the Universe* (we wonder what they do?). It stars Paul McGann as, the Eighth Doctor. This is all very intriguing as while River may have good knowledge of the Doctor's past lives, we are led to believe (from *Silence in the Library*) the Doctor didn't meet River until his tenth incarnation.

If that wasn't enough of a mystery, *River Song* also features large in the March 2016 release *Doom Coalition 2*, a new set of stories for the Eighth Doctor carrying on from the award-winning *Dark Eyes*. As it says in the synopsis, how can *River Song* help the Doctor if she can't meet him?

To add balance, there is also the chance for other twentieth century Doctors to join the party. With a date yet to be announced (Christmas, maybe?), the release of *Classic Doctors, New Monsters* will give us the Fifth Doctor meeting the Weeping Angels (don't blink on audio?), the Sixth Doctor encountering the Judoon and the Seventh Doctor facing the Sycorax. The Eighth Doctor also has a chance to meet some Time War-trained Sontarans! There is plenty of scope for more stories like this including the Fourth Doctor and even (by proxy) the First, Second and Third.

Whatever else may be announced, fans of *Doctor Who* audio have a lot more to look forward to than ever before, and long may it continue!

TONY JONES

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GENRE LITERATURE



THE SHEPHERD'S CROWN Dominates Book Charts

Terry Pratchett's final Discworld novel, **The Shepherd's Crown** has taken the place at the top of book charts across the English-speaking world, easily beating David Lagercrantz's **The Girl in the Spider's Web**, which continues Stieg Larsson's **Millennium** series. **The Shepherd's Crown** has been praised by everyone who read it. The world-famous writer passed away earlier this year. Pratchett's daughter, Rhianna, stated, following his death, that there will be no more novels set in the Discworld and no one will continue the series.

Helsinki to Host 2017 Worldcon

The Helsinki In 2017 camp have won the bid to host the 75th World Science Fiction Convention in Finland, following a public vote by members of Sasquan, the 73rd Worldcon this August. Worldcon 75 will be held at the Messukeskus, the Helsinki Expo and Convention Centre on August 9th-13th, 2017. The bid fought off rivals from Washington DC, Montréal and Japan. Despite the name, Worldcon is usually held in the USA as the majority of the attendees are American. It's worth noting that those attending Helsinki 2017 will get to vote on where the 2019 Worldcon will be held. Currently, the only city organising a bid for 2019 is Dublin, Ireland. Could this be the start of a truly international Worldcon? Time will tell.

SLUG BOY Wins Kelpies

Mark Smith's debut work **Slug Boy Saves the World** has won this year's Kelpies Prize, which is awarded to children's books set in Scotland. It's a book about 11-year-old Murdo, who gets super powers from a radioactive slug. Smith was presented with a £2,000 cash prize from Debi Giori, illustrator-in-residence at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. The prize is organised by Floris Books and Creative Scotland. It has been running since 2005.

eBook Raises Money for Con or Bust

The parody eBook **John Scalzi Is Not A Very Popular Author And I Myself Am Quite Popular** has raised over \$10,000 for Con or Bust, a charity that funds science fiction convention memberships for people of colour. Scalzi offered to record an audio-book version of the eBook if that goal was reached, and the MP3 can now be found via his website. The book itself is a parody of another work, called **SJWs Always Lie: Taking Down the Thought Police** by Scalzi's substandard nemesis, Theodore Beale (aka Vox Day).

THREE-BODY PROBLEM to be made into Movie

Liu Cixin's novel **The Three-Body Problem** is to be turned into a feature film. Director Fanfan Zhang has been attached to the project, and it is scheduled for release in July 2016. The book is the first title in the **Three-Body Series**, telling the story of a civilisation in another solar system that is facing extinction and chooses to invade the Earth to save itself. The series has already received China's Galaxy Award, and has sold more than 1.5 million copies in its original Chinese while the 2014 translation by Ken Liu has been winning awards in the English-speaking world this year.

Hugo Awards Announced; Controversy Continues

The Hugo Awards were announced at Sasquan - The 73rd World Science Fiction Convention, USA, in August. Winners included **The Three-Body Problem** by Liu Cixin for Best Book and **Ms Marvel** by G. Willow Wilson, Adrian Alphona and Jake Wyatt for Best Graphic Novel. **Guardians of the Galaxy** won Best Dramatic Presentation and the **Galactic Suburbia Podcast** won Best Fancast. Five categories of the 2015 Hugo Awards failed to award any trophy this year, as voters selected 'No Award' instead of any of the nominees in those categories. This option is usually selected when a voter feels that the range of nominees is so poor that no one should win. This year's awards were unusual because special interest groups had exploited the nomination rules to knock people off the list and replace them with their own specific choices. Those categories affected by this exploit received 'No Award' instead, thanks to a concerted effort by Worldcon members. The exploit has since been closed by changing the voting mechanism to Single Divisible Vote - Least Popular Elimination which will come into effect by 2017.

George R. R. Martin Hosts One-Off Award Ceremony

Regular attendee at Worldcon events and creator of the **Game of Thrones** and **Wild Cards** series, George R. R. Martin responded to the Hugo Award controversy by hosting his own awards ceremony, called The Alfies. The first Alfies Award for best novel was **The Demolished Man** by Alfred Bester. The prizes were rocket-like hood ornaments, a reference to a long-standing in-joke about the Hugo Award rockets. The prizes were handed out at The Hugo Losers party, a private event that Martin has been hosting regularly for a number of years and which happens shortly after the Hugo Awards ceremony. Winners were selected using data from this year's Hugo nominations and included those who were not on the final Hugo ballot.

Sledge-Lit Tickets Available

UK genre book event Edge-Lit has launched a winter event, Sledge-Lit, which will be held at the Derby QUAD on November 21st. Guests include Charles Stross and Alison Moore. Tickets are available from derbyquad.co.uk

STARBURST's own book podcast, **THE BOOKWORM**, is filled with all the latest news, reviews and interviews and can be found on Twitter @radiobookworm

COMING SOON



MADE TO KILL

AUTHOR: ADAM CHRISTOPHER
PUBLISHER: TOR BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 3RD

Adam Christopher is very good at creating strange and wonderful noir-style worlds. **Made to Kill** is the story of Raymond Electromatic, a Private Investigator for the Electromatic Detective Agency along with Ada, office gal and super-computer and the constant voice in Ray's inner ear. Ray might have taken up a new

line of work, but money is money, after all, and he was programmed to make a profit. Besides, with his twenty-four-hour memory-tape limits, he sure can keep a secret.

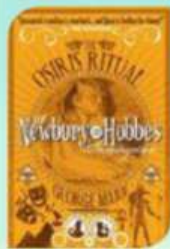


THE SECRETS OF DREARCLIFF GRANGE SCHOOL

AUTHOR: KIM NEWMAN
PUBLISHER: TITAN
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 23RD

Kim Newman is back and he's still the master of the creepy and the magical mixed into one glorious shudder. **The Secrets of Drearcliff Grange School** follows the story of Amy, a

girl who discovers that her dull and depressing 1920s boarding school is nothing of the sort. In fact, it's a special place where super villains and master criminals keep their daughters safe. Of course, things go wrong, so it's up to Amy to form her own secret society and sort it all out.



THE OSIRIS RITUAL: A NEWBURY AND HOBBS INVESTIGATION

AUTHOR: GEORGE MANN
PUBLISHER: TITAN
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 6TH

Mummy's Curses! Mysterious Deaths! It can only mean one thing. Sir Maurice Newbury has a new case, one that will drag him into a web of occult mystery and intrigue. Of course, he's ably assisted by the lovely

Veronica Hobbess, who has a much stickier mystery to untangle, one that could change Victorian London forever. George Mann is always worth a read, and a new Newbury and Hobbess book is always worth the time.



THE WHEEL OF TIME COMPANION

AUTHORS: ROBERT JORDAN, HARRIET MCDUGAL, ALAN ROMANCZUK & MARIA SIMONS
PUBLISHER: ORBIT
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 5TH

Everyone likes a source book, and given the size and scale of The Wheel of Time series, it should come as no surprise that The Wheel of Time Companion is a bit big. Packed with previously unreleased information, you can finally discover the strength level of many

channelers and all the details on every named character. The book includes a dictionary of the Old Tongue news maps of the Last Battle as well as the histories and customs of the nations of the world.

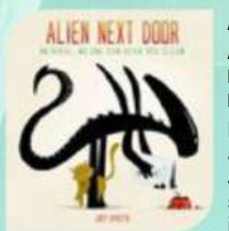


ALICE'S NIGHTMARE IN WONDERLAND

AUTHOR: JONATHAN GREEN
PUBLISHER: SNOWBOOKS
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 1ST

Set several years after the events of

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and **Through the Looking Glass**, Alice finds herself back in Wonderland and called upon to save the world of playing cards and talking animals from the increasingly deranged Queen of Hearts. But all is not as it first appears in the fluctuating dream world and soon Alice is battling to save herself from the nightmare that is rapidly overtaking the realm. This time round, YOU get to make the decisions. We're really looking forward to this gamebook version of Alice, created by a master of the field.



ALIEN NEXT DOOR

AUTHOR: JOEY SPIOOTTO
PUBLISHER: TITAN
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 6TH

Fun picture books of old sci-fi movies are all the rage at the moment (just ask Jeffrey Brown), but this one is something special. **Alien Next Door** sees Giger's iconic serpentine xenomorph become all

domesticated. Laugh as he interacts with Jonesy the cat, scares space marines, and deals with the house work. This book makes the Alien so adorable that you'll want to (face) hug it. Spiootto is better known for his work on **Dead Space** and **Polar Bear Express**, a mix of concepts which we're sure helped him come up with this.

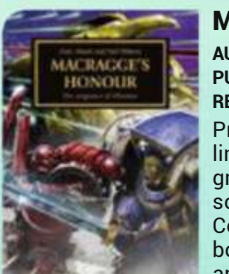


THE HANGING TREE

AUTHOR: BEN AARONOVITCH
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 19TH

Peter Grant returns to the streets of London in the latest Ben Aaronovitch book. Namely Marble Arch, a place that once hosted the notorious Tyburn gallows known as The Hanging Tree. Oxford Street was the last trip of the condemned (tell that to the tourists). With such a bloody and haunted legacy, something spooky

is bound to happen, and now it's up to Grant and the Folly to discover what terrible thing stalks the streets of the capital.



MACRAGGE'S HONOUR

AUTHORS: DAN ABNETT AND NEIL ROBERTS
PUBLISHER: BLACK LIBRARY
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 22ND

Previously only available as a super-limited-edition hardcover, Horus Heresy graphic novel Macragge's Honour will soon be available for us all to enjoy. Combining Abnett's world-class comic book writing talents with the legendary art of Neil Roberts, this book is an epic space battle set in the final days of the

Battle of Macragge, a key sequence in the Horus Heresy. It's the one many fans have been waiting for.

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS

SOMTOW SUCHARITKUL

Starship & Haiku

All readers know that writing is exploratory. It takes you to cities you've never been to and worlds you've never dreamed of; to long-dead times and to the horrible corners of the most fractured psyches. Through reading we get to experience life in a thousand different ways, and through writing the author gets to take a close look at their own. And that's exactly what happens in S. P. Somtow's *Starship & Haiku*...

After the Millennial War, the planet is half-dead and full of mutants. Japan is a lone pillar of civilisation, but even that is being chipped away as suicide rates begin to soar. In

Hawaii, Josh Nakamura decides to take his brother and leave the USA for Japan's more hopeful shores. But what he finds is not the better life he expected, and the people he meets lead him

towards a future far stranger than he past he left behind.

Somtow Papinian Sucharitkul (penname S. P. Somtow) is a Thai author born in Bangkok, raised in England, and settled in the United States, and it's important to know these things because they massively impact his writing. When you set aside the sci-fi trappings, *Starship & Haiku* is a book about cultural identity. Through Josh, Somtow questions whether identity is something born—something intrinsic to our racial DNA—or something bred—learned in our environment. Josh was born to Japanese parents, and grew up with a proudly Japanese grandmother, but he never truly understands what it means to be Japanese. It's a veil he can never lift, one that gets denser every time he encounters a native Japanese person and is confused by their mannerisms, attitudes, and unique passions. Being raised in America has alienated Josh from his ancestral culture, and even moving to Japan doesn't mitigate that. He belongs, but only superficially, and Somtow ultimately questions why. Why can Josh never fully feel Japanese? Why is Josh's duality such a stumbling block between him and the native Japanese characters? Why aren't the similarities that do exist - the shared humanity - enough? I can only assume that these are questions Somtow asked himself when he first visited Thailand, and the answer he comes to in the book is a profound one: while every culture is beautiful and our sense of cultural identity is important, it gets in the way of us fully connecting as members of the human race. Culture is 'only an overlay', and one we shouldn't allow to rule us.

With such a heavy subject, I'm sure many of you are thinking that this book must be dense and dull and a thousand pages long. It can't possibly be entertaining. Or weird. Or in any way wonderful. At only

210 pages (in the 1988 Del Rey edition), *Starship & Haiku* tackles its big questions with grace, humour, and heartbreak, leading readers to conclusions that are both profound and accessible. The prose is light and the characters are vivid, and the stranger aspects of the novel lighten the apocalyptic atmosphere. Somtow's vision of the Earth's end of days is very unique. *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* unique. Yes, whales are key players in this book, and while there's no time travel, there is telepathic communication, a whale legend, and a weird new life for the species. Whales are treated with such respect and reverence in this book, that I wouldn't be surprised if Somtow is expressing a bit of anti-whaling sentiment. Commercial whaling wasn't banned in Japan until five years after the novel's publication, and while Somtow isn't out-and-out criticising whaling, he is gently reminding us of the whales' right to exist. Whales are intelligent and deep feeling, he says, just like us. Their place on the planet is just as valid as ours. Somtow doesn't preach, but he is still wonderfully impactful.

If this book has one flaw, it's that there isn't more of it. I want to see more of the characters' daily lives: their jobs and friends and their thoughts on their families; Josh's voyage to Japan and his experiences there; I want to learn more about the Millennial War. What we get is beautiful, but I feel that there is so much more to tell. More detail. More intimacy. But then, like a haiku, maybe brevity is the point.

S. P. Somtow has written countless novels, composed symphonies and operas, and has numerous awards to his name. *Starship & Haiku* may not be his most celebrated novel (although it did win a Locus Award for Best First Novel), but it is a brilliant introduction to his work and a compelling look at his thoughts on life as he's lived it. If you want something different, then this is the book for you.

‘Eloquent, shimmering writing unfurls a haunting story of
childhood, grief and obsession’

SIMON CLARK

THE ELECTRIC



ANDREW DAVID
BARKER

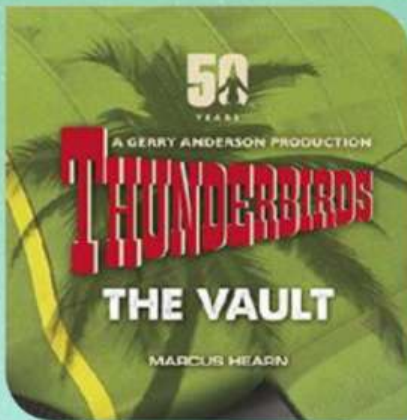
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REVIEWS

THE LATEST RELEASES
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THUNDERBIRDS: THE VAULT

AUTHOR: MARCUS HEARN / PUBLISHER: VIRGIN BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The fiftieth anniversary of the late Gerry Anderson's seminal Supermarionation smash *Thunderbirds* - the exploits of the Tracy family and their fleet of sophisticated way-beyond-iconic rescue aircraft and paraphernalia - is celebrated in glorious style in this extraordinary, lavish and incredibly thorough examination of the origins and making of a genuine TV classic. Marcus Hearn, who put together a similar Vault title for *Doctor Who*'s half-century a couple of years ago, has again come up with the definitive work

on its subject matter and if the story of how *Thunderbirds* came into existence is one familiar to hardcore Anderson fans, it's never been presented so beautifully and with such magnificent care and attention as *The Vault*.

Thunderbirds: The Vault's 240 wonderfully presented pages are packed with rare and unseen publicity and behind-the-scenes photographs, with images of long-forgotten merchandise from toys to ice lollies to comics and all points in between. The first two chapters briskly recount how Gerry Anderson and his partner Arthur Provis created AP Films (later Century 21 Productions), their early work for the fearsome Roberta Leigh and their eventual progression into their own projects - *Four Feather Falls* and *Supercar* - and the formation of Gerry's long, fruitful working relationship with the legendary Lew Grade. Packed with comment and observation culled from new interviews with surviving cast and crew and previously unpublished archive interviews with both Gerry and Sylvia Anderson, the story of an enduring and beloved phenomenon is told in fascinating detail with each of the show's thirty-two episodes examined and chronicled for posterity. It's warts-and-all stuff, too; Hearn isn't afraid to let his contributors speak their mind about aspects of the show's production and Century 21's working practices which didn't sit so well with them, but by and large the mood is

celebratory and congratulatory - this was clearly a very special time in all their lives, working in a thriving, creative and exciting environment.

But the joy of the immersive sections on *Thunderbirds* is inevitably soured by later chapters which detail the slow, steady decline of Anderson's fortunes - and his marriage to Sylvia - post-*Thunderbirds*. Two poorly-performing feature films couldn't keep the series alive and Grade's failure to secure a significant American sale made continued production of *Thunderbirds* a financial no-no. Gerry's subsequent series were markedly less successful and by the end of the 1960s, the glory days of Century 21 were over and by 1971, the company's Stirling Road studios in Slough were closed.

But *Thunderbirds: The Vault* is a book that venerates one particular televisual success story and in that regard, it's virtually beyond criticism. It's a visual treasure trove, page after page of evocative photographs and illustrations complementing Hearn's crisp, purposeful text. Whether you're an Anderson devotee or just a fan of classic television, this is a book to savour, to sit, relish and glory in. They don't make TV like *Thunderbirds* anymore but, fortunately, they do still make books like *The Vault*. An essential purchase.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★★ 10



DEADLANDS: GHOSTWALKERS

AUTHOR: JONATHAN MABERRY / PUBLISHER: TOR / RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 1ST

The *Deadlands* franchise started out as a table-top roleplaying game, but like many of these things, it's slowly expanding its

appeal thanks to the growing interest in stories with solid world-building. It is an alternate history Wild West world, where the presence of a supernaturally-enhanced fuel (called Ghost Rock) has sped up technology in an anachronistic sort of way. It's also a world where ghouls, ghosts and other hideous creatures seem to have clawed their way out of Hell. In short, it's steampunk horror for those who prefer cowboys to Victorian explorers.

Jonathan Maberry is a highly prolific creator of pulp horror fiction who mostly focuses on short and snappy horror stories that feature vampires and zombies. The Bram Stoker Award-winning author's work includes *Patient Zero*, *Ghost Road*, *Blues* and *Rot and Ruin*. Given his back catalogue, you have to wonder why they hadn't thought of bringing him into the *Deadlands* franchise sooner.

Deadlands: Ghostwalkers brings the two together to create a superior piece of pulp adventure. Make no mistake; this is not high literature, its pulp adventure. The horror is

of the gross-out and jump-scare kind, with extended action scenes and lots of gun play. The story focuses on Grey Torrance, a cowboy cut-and-pasted from any given Clint Eastwood or Yul Brynner movie. He has a trusty Native American sidekick who tags along to mostly provide endless sarcasm and pull Torrance's fat out of the fire during the scarier scenes. The ladies are tough yet sassy, the holy men are brave yet easily shocked, and so on.

Deadlands: Ghostwalkers is a perfect introduction into the world of *Deadlands*; it's filled with tropes, actions and violence yet at the same time has a sharp and distinct vibe throughout. Those who know the world well (and know the broader story arcs) will read this with a sly grin on their faces, as they are well aware of what is coming next. Newcomers are in for a treat. A great start to what we hope becomes a regular thing.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★ 6



STAR WARS: AFTERMATH

AUTHOR: CHUCK WENDIG
PUBLISHER: CENTURY
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When Disney acquired the rights to the Star Wars franchise, they threw out the canon established

by all of the books that had been written over the decades. This bold move not only allowed a fresh start, it also gave fans a chance to jump on board. This means that Star Wars: Aftermath is the only canonical Star Wars novel that follows on from Return of the Jedi. It's also filled with a few hints and visions of what the new movie may be like.

The central plot revolves around a gathering of Imperial leaders (called Moffs) gathering on Akiva, a distant Outer Rim world. After their sound thrashing at Endor, the surviving Imperial forces are on the clock, with rapidly dwindling resources. Because this is Star Wars, it's not going to go smoothly. For a start, legendary Rebel hero Wedge Antilles has blundered across the gathering and promptly gotten captured.

Fortunately for the galaxy (and for Wedge), a scrappy band of unlikely heroes also happen to be on Akiva to put a stop to the bad guys before they act.

Star Wars: Aftermath is a delicious grab bag of lovely ideas and scenes. For a start, our cast of heroes includes a rebel fighter pilot who still has nightmares of flying away from the core of an exploding Death Star, a young man who likes to make killer robots, and a former Imperial 'loyalty' officer with a wicked sense of humour. We also meet one of the most interesting (and terrifying) murder machines produced in the Star Wars universe so far.

Chuck Wendig has a strong reputation for action adventure and horror stories, and it's his sardonic voice that carries the story forward. For a start, he

describes the Ewoks as 'rat bears', which is a great description of the horrid things. He also sets up a galaxy in chaos extremely well, drawing on the uncertainty of war to keep the reader grounded and engaged. The book is littered with interludes, which give us a good idea of how people are responding to the death of the Emperor. There is also a rather fine cameo from Han and Chewie, which makes the reader want to find whatever book their adventure is expanded from and read it immediately.

Overall, Star Wars: Aftermath is a cracking read and only adds to the growing excitement for the new Star Wars movie.

ED FORTUNE



THE HOUSE ON COLD HILL

AUTHOR: PETER JAMES
PUBLISHER: MACMILLAN
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 8TH

Peter James is best known for his Roy Grace crime series, but he is also known for a few standalone, supernatural novels. His latest release, The House on Cold Hill, is a traditional haunted house horror story. These types of novels can be fairly limited in scope, with many stories being focused on a family moving into a house and finding supernatural entities already present. Although this novel also follows the conventional haunted house story, Peter James is able to write an intriguing story.

The opening really portrays James' approach to this story, which is to make a brutally shocking and fast paced novel. The very beginning will get the readers hooked straight away, but the pace slows down to enable

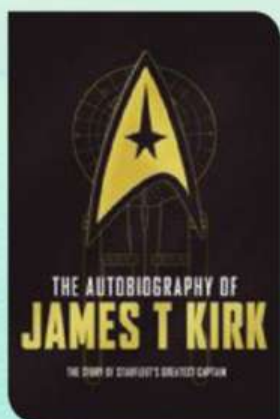
tension and characterisation. The short chapters throughout the novel enable the tension to be built slowly and allow the delivery of a few shocking supernatural moments.

The characters in the novel can both be likeable, but at times frustratingly unaware of all the events that are going on. Ollie and Caro Harcourt are the main characters that move into the house. James effectively uses these characters and their occupations to weave in the supernatural elements of the story. This allows the horror elements to also take place outside of the confines of the house. The character of Jade, Ollie and Caro's younger daughter, does come across as the stereotypical youth in this

novel, and unfortunately her moments in the story can slow down the pacing.

Overall, The House on Cold Hill does have some new elements to the classic haunted house tale, but it is unable to go beyond these confining walls. The novel is a fast paced tale, and although it is a predictable read, it is a well written classic haunted house story, with a few twists and turns that are a welcome addition to a haunted house novel. This is a good ghost story, with some spine chilling moments and a few intriguing twists that enable it to be distinguishable from other, similar titles.

ANDREW MUSK



THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JAMES T. KIRK

AUTHOR: DAVID A. GOODMAN
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Books as artefacts from fictional universes tend to rely on novelty to remain interesting. More often than not, things pretending to be 'real' starship manuals or magical bestiaries tend to break the illusion at some point as the needs of the story override the illusion. The Autobiography of James T. Kirk avoids this by taking itself 100% seriously and at the same time having its tongue rammed firmly in its cheek.

For a start, this book follows the adventures of the Shatner version of Kirk, rather than the movie reboot version. It's also a fairly complete account of the good captain's life, starting with Kirk talking about the circumstances of his birth and running all the way to just before his last mission (Spock provides

a rather poignant epitaph at the end which is suitably both cheesy and profound).

David A. Goodman captures Kirk's voice perfectly throughout, and the result is a clever, sardonic and insightful episode guide of sorts. The book, after all, is Kirk talking about how he felt about the various missions he was involved in and how they affected him personally. Goodman takes the opportunity to give Kirk closure at key points; Kirk comes to terms with the multiple deaths of those he's worked with and so on. This is a book written by a (fictional) older man looking back on his life with a wry sense of humour and decades of really weird experiences.

This is not a book for the casual fan; a strong familiarity

of the source material is necessary to get many of the jokes and to understand where the captain of the Enterprise is coming from. For example, there's an absolutely lovely snark at Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country which would make no sense to anyone who hadn't seen it, but is one of the best gags in the book.

The Autobiography of James T. Kirk is a lovely thing; it's an entirely in-universe book that at the same time provides meta-commentary on what makes Star Trek such an enduring and endearing show. Lots of fun and highly recommended.

ED FORTUNE



VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS MONITOR DUTY TO BRING YOU THE LATEST FROM THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOKS



over monitor duties at the **Watchtower** (just call me Joel J'onzz), but there's nothing wrong with a little depth every now and then. And there's nothing like the cyclical nature of the news, as it were, to make one feel a bit reflective. Change is constant in the comic book universes we so love, from the birth of the New 52 to Marvel's ongoing and ambitious 'all new, all different' initiative. But one thing that's even more constant is the return to the status quo. And the DC Universe is showing a lot of that this month.

First up, following his apparent (but not even nearly plausible) 'death' at the end of *Endgame*, Bruce Wayne is set to reclaim the mantle of the Bat. We've seen him re-emerge as Wayne, bearded and dating, but now we'll have Batman back in Issue #44 of the same name (out now). But not really – not properly. Psyche. It's a flashback issue, illustrated by Jock and written by Scott Snyder, telling the origin of villain Mr Bloom. The story will see Batman investigating a vicious crime in the Narrows of Gotham – one which will tie directly into the present, where buff Jim Gordon is still dressed as Batman and sans moustache. So Batman remains out of action for the time being, but this is no sillier than that last time he 'died' and had to fight his way through history (Pirate Batman!) in order to get back to the present. Just stick with it and enjoy the ride. Proper Batman will be back soon and, hopefully, Jim Gordon's moustache too.

Another blast from DC's past has popular war hero Sergeant Rock return from the comic book ether in *Justice League United #13* (also out now). Here we see him part of a story which takes in Steel, Robotman, Batgirl and Vandal Savage, displaced in an entirely odd warzone, where DCU hero Sgt. Rock makes his long-awaited (hey, I was waiting for it) return.

More than Sgt. Rock, more than Bruce Wayne's Batman (he's never really left) – the one thing we've *really* been waiting for from DC is the reconciliation of that universe's best and most important marriage (sorry Aquaman and Mera – also split up, by the way): Lois and Clark. Bear with us though, for there's some *Convergence* context at play here, so it may get a bit confusing. *Superman: Lois and Clark* will see the pre-*Flashpoint* couple alive and well, hiding within the 'New 52' Universe. So while post-reboot Superman is having a rough time of it (what with his secret identity being revealed most recently), that has repercussions for pre-reboot Clark, trying to keep his head down

Brr. Feel that? There's a chill in the air. Winter, as they say, is coming. With SDCC in the rear view mirror and the majority of the year behind us, we're in the twilight of news for 2015. What does that mean for **View from the Watchtower** and the comic book news reported upon

therein? Stuff all, really. It might have busier periods here and there, but such is the nature of news – it's always happening! – that it carries on, pretty much infinitely.

'Easy now,' I hear you say, 'this is getting a bit deep, aye.' Well maybe it's because it's nearly two years since I took



among the other people. The full story will be told this October, and is to feature a bearded Superman in a black costume. Still no red trunks, then.

Still looking to the past – we've mentioned in previous months the coming sequel to Frank Miller's seminal *The Dark Knight Returns* and not-so seminal *The Dark Knight Strikes Again*, to be written by Miller and Brian Azzarello. Its time is almost upon us, heralded by the first of a number of variant covers – this one depicting Batman standing over the dead body of The Joker, pretty much as we left The Clown Prince of Crime in *TDKR* (no, the good one – *Returns*), batarang poking out of his face. It gives no indication as to what the story might be, but it's a striking image nevertheless. *The Dark Knight III: The Master Race* will arrive this November. Expect variant issues. So many variant issues...

Keeping an eye on the variant issues – which, this November, will get you your favourite DC superheroes teaming up with some of your favourite WB cartoon characters. That's 25 Looney Tunes variants (no, *The Master Race* probably won't have one) with Batman and Superman sharing covers with the likes of Bugs Bunny and The Road Runner. Even this isn't new though, casting our minds back to that one time when the JLA teamed up with the WB cartoons and *The Sunday Times* gave the whole thing away for free on a weekly basis in their *Funday Times* (for kids, geddit. That Wascally Wupert Murdoch). Ah, memories.

To Marvel, then, where we find this particular Universe still busy at work changing its status quo on an almost daily basis. The identity of The New Hulk has been revealed, and it is indeed set to be the guy we all guessed it was (distinctive hair) – the chap with the great name, Amadeus Cho. Where does that leave Bruce Banner, then? We shouldn't worry, according to Marvel head honcho Axel Alonso, and it has been reported Bruce will still be active



in the Marvel Universe. "He has a place," Alonso said, "and I think it's going to become fascinating what that place is in the coming months." Banner's new place and Amadeus (Amadeus!) Cho's new one will be revealed in *Totally Awesome Hulk* #1, out this December.

Potentially next up for the unemployment line is Frank Castle, aka The Punisher. Conspicuously absent from the All New, All Different line-ups so far, we've been wondering where ol' Frank has gone. The answer could come in October's *Contest of Champions*, which is set to feature the return of Outlaw (the Marvel one, not the under-loved 2000 AD fellow), best described (by himself) as 'The British Punisher'. While we haven't seen much of Frank lately, the variant cover to *Contest* sees Outlaw striking a very Punisher-like pose and wearing a certain skull on his chest. Another Punisher? The criminal underworld had best watch its back. As had Frank.

Elsewhere at Marvel, we see their Secret Wars still in full swing, giving you the chance to relive *Civil War* and *One More Day* over and over again (look, we all just wanted to forget that the latter even existed). We've talked about cycles and change a lot in this instalment of *The Watchtower*, and Marvel are curious in that they seem to be doing both at the same time – changing the status quo quite drastically, while also having a lot of fun playing with their past. Don't like it? Well, they're bound to change it all back again in time.

Next, we travel outside of the Big Two Universes to a destination I sometimes describe as the 'smaller' press. Yeah, shut up, I know it's still Marvel. No chance of that this month, where we visit a little property called *Star Wars*, which will be giving a little known character named C-3PO his own spinoff title. In this one-shot issue, we'll learn how the dreadfully polite English robot gets the red arm that

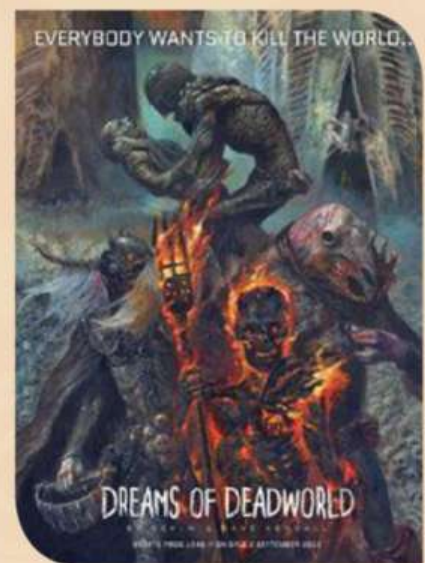


he sports in the *Force Awakens* trailer.

Finally, to 2000 AD, where Dredd creator John Wagner seems to have well and truly overcome his recent Dark Judge reticence to let us have *Dreams of Deadworld*, a prequel which explores the Dark Judges' lives (or lack of them) pre-Mega City One. Kek-W is writing, with artist Dave Kendall on hand to provide the art.

A surprisingly busy month then, for September. Some characters can be found returning from the wilderness while others are heading off to let others claim their mantles and names. Best of all? Those things you hate will soon be forgotten, while the things you loved will eventually return. Rest assured, worried comic book reader, Superman will get his red outside underpants back. One day!

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REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC
BOOK RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



LAST MAN VOLUME 3: THE CHASE

WRITERS & ARTISTS: BASTIEN VIVES, MICHAEL SANLAVILLE, BALAK / PUBLISHER: FIRST SECOND / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 13TH

First Second's Last Man series is a translation of the cult French comic book of the same name. The previous two volumes focused on boxing hero Richard Aldana, a man who fought in an arena filled with the fantastic without relying on magic. He's assisted by his friend Marianne and a young sidekick-in-training called Adrian. The last two books were all about Richard, but The Chase is all about what happens when Richard is gone.

The tale instead puts Marianne and Adrian front and centre. Roaring into action on the back of a rather sweet looking motorbike, the pair find themselves in an entirely different world, coping with entirely new threats, all the while looking for Richard. From the beginning to the end, this is a race; the heroes stumbling between various hazards until the end.

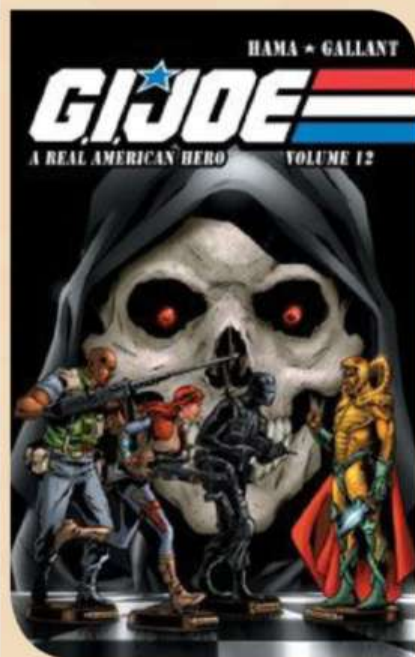
This pace sort of works, but there isn't a lot of time for either character development or world building. What we get instead is an ever-growing stack of ridiculous characters, each with their own singular remarkable trait. The narrative

piles on the silly situations on top of the drama, until various key plot points are revealed. There is some social satire here, but not much. Luckily, the pace is fast enough to gloss over the flaws.

Last Man Volume 3: The Chase is a curious mix of manga art and French sensibilities. Some of the key plot elements feel very European, but the outlandish characters are very Manga in style and approach. The loose art style suits the story, but there is a sore lack of set pieces, meaning that the artists never really get a chance to shine.

The main issue with this book is that it's the middle chapter in an ongoing series, and thus lacks a proper beginning or end. As part of a greater whole, Last Man Volume 3: The Chase is a great part of a continuing action adventure series, but as a stand-alone book, it doesn't quite deliver. Read Last Man from the beginning if you get the chance.

ED FORTUNE



G.I. JOE: A REAL AMERICAN HERO - VOLUME 12

WRITER: LARRY HAMA / ARTIST: S.L. GALLANT / PUBLISHER: IDW / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 1ST

With the plethora of '80s reboots out there, it seems inevitable that one of these lines would discover that nostalgia can only get you so far. G.I. JOE: A Real American Hero Volume 12 suffers from never being that good in the first place.

Like lots of comic books from the '80s, the G.I. JOE comics were glorified toy adverts. Back in the day, the sequential art version of G.I. JOE was written by Larry Hama for Marvel Comics. IDW now control the license, and they have brought Hama back to inject some of the old magic into the series. Regrettably, all this proves is that the Joes have had their day.

Hama treats G.I. JOE in exactly the same way he did in the '80s. The result is a bright and garish military force which believes that ninjas are the ultimate fighting machines and that an elite squad doesn't have to worry about minor details like securing assets or even putting passwords on their computers. Though this sort of child-like military-inspired fun seemed rather charming over 30 years ago, these days it just seems hopelessly quaint and daft.

The silliness of G.I. JOE: A Real American Hero Volume 12 might have been fine if the book didn't take itself so damned seriously. Despite being a story about giant mind-controlled robots, ninja spies and genetically-engineered

snake kings, Hama seems to insist on injecting pathos into the storyline. War is hell, even for action figures, apparently. This is not a grim reboot by any stretch of the imagination; it just takes itself too seriously. IDW have produced G.I. JOE books that were a mix of spy-fi and military fantasy in the past, but this isn't anything of the sort. Instead it's simply an advert for toys no one buys anymore. That said, the art is pretty enough and certainly each character looks like the models they represent.

The real shame here is that Hama has introduced fan favourite The Red Shadows into the mix. This additional faction to the G.I. JOE universe was originally part of the Action Force range of toys, essentially repainted and rebranded to suit a European audience. They appeared in the Battle Action Force comics and worked well as post-war baddies. Alas, the author has recast them as buffoonish villains indistinguishable from his other antagonists.

G.I. JOE fans will probably eat this up. Those looking for a nostalgia fix may want to seek out old copies of Battle Action Force instead.

ED FORTUNE





THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF WEST

AUTHOR: J.T. PETTY, PAUL POPE / ARTIST: DAVID RUBIN / PUBLISHER: FIRST SECOND / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 13TH

The Fall of the House of West is a sequel to The Rise of Aurora West and a sequel of sorts to Paul Pope's popular Battling Boy series.

In the last book, we learned that Aurora's mother had died at the hands of a seven-fingered demon monster, and that Aurora herself may have had some involvement in bringing the monster into being in the first place. Driven by both justice and revenge, Aurora began to collect evidence so she could find the



creature and end it. It doesn't help that her father, legendary monster-hunter Haggard West, is unaware of her vendetta and is still very reluctant to let her grow up.

The Fall of the House of West is a good example of Paul Pope's storytelling skill. He uses very little in the way of exposition, preferring to let the action do the explaining for him. Mostly this works; the monsters have a sense of mystery about them and though you can draw conclusions as to where their plans are, you're always guessing. Pope's world is one filled with Egyptian artefacts, space-age weapons and extra-dimensional monsters, and it's these more wacky elements that make it compelling.

Rubin's art is highly detailed, yet simple. Multiple clues and design elements



are present throughout, building up various hints toward the plot. The design on the various gribbly creatures that inhabit the world are particularly delightful.

Alas, the story doesn't really go anywhere; we get one or two shocking revelations but all these do is damage the believability of the supporting cast. Aurora's actions make less sense as the story moves forward and the stupidity of the cast's actions doesn't fit the overall mood and theme of the story. If you loved Battling Boy and its spin offs, you'll want to check this out as it does have some key plot points. Otherwise, it's pretty unremarkable.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★ 6



SHERLOCK HOLMES VS. HARRY HOUDINI

WRITER: ANTHONY DEL COL, CONOR MCCREERY / ARTIST: CARLOS FURUZONO / PUBLISHER: DYNAMITE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When Harry met Sherlock - in this spellbinding story there is a clashing of two great minds. But as their egos battle it out, a far more sinister character joins the battle: Rasputin.

Houdini and Holmes must combine their intelligence and work together to protect their friends and family from Rasputin's own ego.

Like the real Houdini, the character here is always honest about his tricks being just tricks; Houdini claims there is no real magic. Sherlock, a man who deciphers everything through science and logic, is also a rather spiritual man. In this adaptation, Sherlock is having trouble with drug abuse, using some kind of foreign substance to make his mind see things it would not otherwise. Houdini is disappointed by Sherlock's cold exterior as he had always admired him. Likewise, Sherlock is equally unimpressed by Houdini's cocky confidence. Writers Anthony Del Col and Conor McCreery (Kill Shakespeare) have taken on quite an intimidating task to portray these larger than life characters, but they have created a fresh plot and the characterisation is spot on with brilliant wit and humour. It is very classic humour and somewhat cheesy, though. Being set in this mystical era of the early 20th century, they can get away with it being a tad ludicrous. This is all emphasised through Carlos Furuzono's art, which is striking in itself; he has created great layouts to depict the action and emotion of each panel.

The most famous escape artist, Harry Houdini, had a real life friendship with Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock

Holmes. It wasn't until Houdini decided it was his duty to shun any kind of real magic and supernatural that there came a conflict between them. This idea has very much been reflected in the friendship between Houdini and Holmes here, only they actually grow to respect each other towards the end. It gets very personal with both heroes having their own issues to deal with, and this builds the characterisation, giving them more depth as a result. It's a brilliant dynamic duo that could take on many adventures and compelling stories.

SAMANTHA WARD

★★★★★ 7



B E A S T T A I L S W A G O N



I've been hearing a lot about all this protesting. It's a very aggressive time. Tensions are running high.



That's why I wanted to take this opportunity to directly address the liberals who would see an end to the hunts.

Firstly, it's an essential part of rural life. It's tradition, isn't it? Why question something we've always done? A ban would collapse the infrastructure of county! That is fact.



Hunting is responsible for jobs. You know how many people would be out of work if we stopped?

Me.

Clive. Clive would be out of work. What would he do all day?



Sit in the sun, I'd imagine.

That sounds nice.

That does sound dead nice actually.

Let's forget Clive for a second and get down to brass tacks on these filthy vermin. They terrorize the countryside! They're more than a nuisance. Running amok. Eating all the chickens. And lamb.

And pheasant.



--MERRY CHASE!--TEN MILES!--LIKE THE BLIGHTER WAS LEADING US--

--INVESTMENT BANKING!-- GOT TO BE A PREDAT--OH GOD!

It's natural and inevitable. Part of our biological make-up, isn't it? Death and suffering are an unavoidable part of life! And this 'inhumane' rubbish?



LOVELY RED COAT

WRITER / OWEN MICHAEL JOHNSON
ILLUSTRATOR / JOHN PEARSON
LETTERER / COLIN BELL

BEAST WAGON CHAPTER TWO ON SALE NOVEMBER

ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY ROUND
UP FROM THE
WORLD OF ANIME
AND MANGA WITH
DOMINIC CUTHBERT



World's First Voice Acting Museum Opens in Tokyo

Chalk up another reason to visit the vibrant mecca of Tokyo. The Seiyuu Museum is the world's first voice acting museum (seiyū being voice actor). Inside is a glut of scripts from over 50 years of Japanese animated history, including **Mobile Suit Gundam**, **One Piece** and **Chibi Maruko-chan**. Some even feature annotations from voice actors with instructions on how to deliver a line. And that's just scratching the surface. The museum, which is affiliated with the voice acting studio 81 Produce - who are currently celebrating their 35th anniversary - is located in Sasazuka, Tokyo, west of Harajuku.

ONE PIECE Kabuki Is a Real Thing That's Happening

The Straw Hat Pirates are set to make their kabuki debut. The story will adapt the Summit War Saga and, giving newcomers the benefit of the doubt, will be easy to follow with no previous knowledge needed. That said, there's plenty for fans as the characters will speak in much the same way as their manga counterparts. Kabuki alumni Ennosuke Ichikawa IV will take on the mantle of Monkey D. Luffy, as well as Shanks and Boa Hancock. In all, there'll be thirty **One Piece** characters in tow. The play will run from October 7th to November 25th at Tokyo's Shinbashi Enbuji.



HATOFUL BOYFRIEND Mastermind Reveals New Visual Novel

Hato Moa, the creator of the frankly bonkers dating sim **Hatoful Boyfriend**, has another visual novel up his sleeve, one that thankfully shies away from avian romance. Set in London 1889, **Black Holmes** is a crime drama where players take on the role of detective Noah Holmes. Promising a dark and dazzling riff on the **Sherlock Holmes** stories, Moa's latest offering is one to watch out for.

Main Voice Cast Reunites For LUPIN THE THIRD Anime

The voice cast for the upcoming **Lupin the Third** series has been revealed, and boasts all of the recent five voice actors reprising their roles - which includes 82-year-old Kiyoshi Kobayashi as Daisuke Jigen. The actors who had previously portrayed Goemon, Fujiko and Zenigata left the series due to their age in 2011. Kobayashi is the last remaining voice actor since the series first aired in 1971. The new series will premiere in October.

Yoshitoshi ABe Celebrates 20th Anniversary with Exhibition

Graffiti artist turned **Serial Experiments Lain** character designer Yoshitoshi ABe is gearing up to celebrate the 20th anniversary of his debut. He'll be releasing a trilogy of art books, alongside an accompanying exhibit which runs from September 19th to October 19th at pixiv Zingaro, Japan. ABe is also currently penning Square Enix's ongoing manga **Ryushika Ryushika**.

NARUTO Scribe Teases New Sci-Fi Series

While the Hollywood adaption of **Naruto** goes through the motions, author Masashi Kishimoto is teasing a U-turn from that hot-headed ninja urchin. During the press junket and promotion for **Boruto: Naruto the Movie**, Kishimoto revealed he's laying the ground work for a sci-fi series. This follows his recent interest in penning a sci-fi addition to the digital **Shōnen Jump Plus**. He's hoping to outdo **Naruto**, which is a tall order for a franchise so exceptionally successful.

New Light Novel Imprint Bags Isin's BISHOUNEN DETECTIVES

In order to court new readers and keep current light novel fans engaged, publisher Kodansha has launched a new imprint, Taiga. Two of the writers on board for its October 20th launch are Hiroshi Mori - rikei mystery author behind **Sky Crawlers** and the **S&M Series** - and the hugely popular **Monogatari** author Nisio Isin. Isin will be using the imprint to introduce his new series **Pretty Boy Detective Team - The Dark Star That Only Shines for You**.

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



A CERTAIN MAGICAL INDEX: SEASON 1

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: HIROSHI NISHIKIORI / SCREENPLAY: MASANAO AKAHOSHI / STARRING: ATSUSHI ABE, YUKA IGUCHI, AKENO WATANABE, ANRI KATSU, KANA ASUMI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Academy City is a technological concoction of schools and colleges, covering a size almost as big as Tokyo. It's a blend of futurism, theology and the arcane, interspersed with whirling turbines and populated with super powered individuals known as espers.

Student Tōma Kamijō has perpetual bad luck. His was a misspent youth tripping over, treading on things and stumbling into embarrassing situations. To put it another way, he's the living embodiment of the adage 'wrong place at the wrong time'.

Underneath his good

nature, Tōma has a sardonic edge and a slacker attitude. He's not very bright, even failing remedial school, or very gifted, being a level 0 esper. Despite his shortcomings in the powers department, he's got some hidden talent. Dubbed the Imagine Breaker, his right hand has the ability to negate any attack or ability.

Following a run-in with hot-headed level 5 esper Misaka Mikoto, Tōma wakes in his student apartment to find a nun balanced on the bannister of his balcony. She tells him her name is Index and she's fleeing the

Necessarius organisation, which she herself is a member of. The reason is because of her eidetic memory or, more specifically, the 103,000 grimoire volumes she's got stowed away in her mind.

The series is from studio J.C.Staff, behind this year's Food Wars, and it shows as Sōma Yukihiro is basically Tōma with red hair. In many ways that's telling of the rest of the series, which plays with viewer expectation.

The most unexpected aspect is the strange plotting. It's circumstantial and reminiscent of the randomness of real life. In TV terms, though, it plays out like a series of mini arcs made to fit the 24 episode formula. Problems can surface and be solved within two episodes of each other, and what appears to be the overarching plot is quickly resolved. There's just too much going on and too quickly, and if the show has one major flaw, it's this.

It's not that all the ideas aren't great - most of them are - it's just the speed at which they arrive and disappear. There's

enough content for three series' worth of story arcs, if only writer Masanao Akaoshi gave plotting and pace more attention. Kazuma Kamachi's source material runs at 24 volumes of light novels, which gives a glimpse into the show's structural issues.

A Certain Magical Index adopts a dreamy pace, encompassing long conversational scenes which sometimes take almost entire episodes to play out. On one hand it's a romantic comedy in the vein of Familiar of Zero, and on the other it's a dark, hard edged sci-fi more akin to Serial Experiments Lain. It might start off as one thing, but quickly morphs into something altogether different. At 24 episodes, it takes the scenic route to its conclusion, but it's a complex, engaging and ungodly mess of a journey.

Extras: Textless opening and closing / Commentaries / Trailer

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



KNIGHTS OF SIDONIA: SEASON 1

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: KÔBUN SHIZUNO / SCREENPLAY: SADAYUKI MURAI / STARRING: RYOTA OHSAKA, AKI TOYOSAKI, ATSUKO TANAKA, AYA SUZAKI, AYANE SAKURA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Knights of Sidonia follows the story of Nagate Tanikaze, who at the start of the series lives underground alone. Eventually he is forced to the surface and encounters Sidonia - an awe-inspiring spaceship city that holds one of the largest human colonies left in the universe. The Guana laid waste to Earth and beyond but have been dormant for over 100 years at the start

of the series, but something tells you they are ready for a comeback. The monstrous and faceless enemy, the Guana play an integral role in Knights of Sidonia. They can't be bargained or reasoned with and are just an instrument of destruction that Sidonia has to come to terms with, leaving it in a constant state of preparation for war.

While the set-up might

not be original, the beautiful animation, setting and characters bring Knights of Sidonia to life. Every frame is incredible to look at and you'll find yourself invested quickly in the struggle of Sidonia against the faceless and fearsome Guana. The Knights pilot Guardians (mechs) and they are pretty similar to what you've seen before in, say, Robotech or Gundam, but it's the approach of Knights of Sidonia that makes it unique.

The show has many layers; on the surface it appears to be a 'rise through the pilot ranks' mech drama, yet bubbling under the surface there are musings on war, peace, sex, reproduction, politics and even religion. These undercurrents are the things that invest you in Sidonia and its characters. Everyone from Nagate to Lala to the Immortal Council, who are shrouded in secrecy, play an integral part in the plot and world building.

Noriyuki Asakura delivers a stunning score that brims with emotion. The soundscape also matches the visuals really well, with the quiet moments offering sombreness and reflection while the massive mechs vs. Gauna battles pop and explode at just the right moments. Of course, no anime would be complete without an awesome title song, and Knights of Sidonia delivers. You should really go listen to it now, and it will make you want to watch the show.

Knights of Sidonia offers a complex, rich and dynamic take on a mecha genre. While it does have some clumsy storytelling at times, it can be forgiven because it offers emotional investment, amazing animation and a killer soundtrack. This is a must-watch for any fan of sci-fi.

ROD MCCANCE

★★★★★★★★★★ 9

COSPLAY CATWALK

A MONTHLY FOCUS ON THE COSTUMED ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT FAN CONVENTIONS AROUND THE WORLD



MATT INKEL is known to both the cosplay and steampunk community as a creator of wonderful toys. We caught up with the highly experienced maker of movie props and quality accessories to find out more and to take a look at some of his gorgeous work...

STARBURST: So what is it that you do?

Matt Inkel: I run a small one-man company called Arcane Armoury. I'm essentially a prop maker who, whilst I do a lot of work in the Steampunk genre, will take commission work to build almost anything for anyone. I have an Etsy shop and can also be found on various social media platforms. I'd say I'm mostly known for the Steampunk weapons I build using mainly wood and metal to give them an authentic feel and weight, which is very important to me, but I've built everything from guitars to decorative skulls.

How did you get into doing that?

I was an industrial model maker for about 15 years working in and around London, doing TV commercials, architectural models, exhibitions and small film props. My dad was a model maker, my mother has a background in graphic design and

illustration, and my sister was also a model maker. Making stuff runs in the family!

What's the trickiest prop you've made?

The trickiest prop I ever made was a full metal copy of River Song's sonic screwdriver from *Doctor Who*. There was a lot of careful set up and machining on that one, but the hardest bit was making all the electronics fit into what is actually a very tiny space.

What's your favourite outfit?

I have a wonderful faux leather trader's frock coat and waistcoat, made by Abigail Parr of Wiserabbit; it's a perfect fit and I just love it.

How is steampunk different from cosplay?

Steampunk is neo-Victorian science fiction: many of the costumes you see are a steampunk twist on well-known characters such as Boba Fett, Deadpool

or Iron Man but often most Steampunks just create their own characters such as monster hunters and air pirates. It's a growing genre and the media are catching on to the possibilities, the aesthetics are wonderful and the quality of costumes increases every year.

What advice do you have for anyone planning on making their own kit?

To put it simply, do your research. Find out all you can about the sort of route you want to take and the look you enjoy. There are masses of tutorials on YouTube and often costumes and props can be made for very little money. Join forums on Facebook and other social media, often members are more than willing to share information and techniques with anyone who is interested and you meet the most wonderful people and make the greatest friends.

WORDS: ED FORTUNE

You can buy Matt's work at: etsy.com/shop/ArcaneArmoury.



READER'S COSPLAY
"DARKIEKUN"

STARBURST: When did you start cosplaying?

Darkiekun: I have been cosplaying since 2006/2007. My best friend introduced me to it as she and her brother were already into it. My first cosplay was Riku from *Kingdom Hearts 2*. It was a bought cosplay from eBay - about £50 at the time. It was wrong in many ways, not really like the character, but I was still so over the moon to be dressed as this character! After about two to three years, I started to make my own cosplays and I have enjoyed it ever since.

Who is your favourite character to dress as?

Sora from the *Kingdom Hearts* series! I have many of his outfits and I always make new ones to improve them. His personality and spirit gets to me on a personal level. He is kind and determined. He isn't the best at what he does, but he still tries very hard and gains amazing friends on his way.

How long does a costume usually take?

It depends on the cosplay really and my normal work life. I can spend from a week to a few months. Depending on what materials I need, research, props, and wigs. I enjoy making a wide variety of costumes and my current favourite is making detailed cosplays and lots of frills. Over the top girly, floaty, and such. I spend longer on outfits I generally want to use for competitions or want to wear more than once. I have made cosplays a few days before a convention before now. Just depends!

WORDS: ED FORTUNE

You can like Darkiekun's page and see more of her wonderful costumes: facebook.com/pages/Darkiekun-Cosplays/435662573182853.



Photos: Stephanie Budden

Are you a cosplayer and want to see your work featured in STARBURST?

Drop us an email at
cosplay@starburstmagazine.com
and we'll print our favourites every month

PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS
IN GAMING
BY LEE PRICE



MORTAL KOMBAT X Scrapped on 360 and PS3

Things just keep getting worse for High Voltage Software. After making a bad start to their conversion run on the latest **Mortal Kombat** game with a PC version that was riddled with bugs and pretty damned awful, it looks like they won't be getting the chance to redeem themselves with the versions they were working on for the Xbox 360 and PS3 either.

Warner Brothers has announced that it is pulling the plug on the conversions following a multitude of delays. The games, which were meant to come out alongside every other version of the title, have clearly been hit with plenty of development troubles, with WB stating that they simply can't get them out and anybody who has pre-ordered will be getting a refund.

While they were diplomatic in their statement in regards to High Voltage, you have to believe that this signals the end for any working relationship the two companies had. Whether High Voltage will be able to make it to the end of 2015 with their reputation intact remains to be seen.

COMING SOON



FALLOUT 4

PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 10TH

*It's finally here and it's looking like it's going to be the very first really major hit of the current generation that isn't also going to find its way onto older consoles. Bethesda did great work with **Fallout 3**, while **New Vegas** was also awesome, if a little glitchy. We simply can't wait to see what they have in store for us with the latest in the series. If you can only get one game this month, make sure this is right at the top of the list, as we don't see it being anything less than stellar.*

COMING SOON



STAR FOX ZERO

PLATFORM: WII U
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 20TH

*Nintendo's resident foxypilot has never quite hit the heights he achieved back in the days of the SNES and N64, even though none of the subsequent games have been awful. This game is essentially a reboot, rather than a direct sequel, and will feature the traditional **Star Fox** gameplay as imagined by the wonderful minds at Platinum Games. If nothing else, that means that you can expect quality and perhaps a touch of quirkiness from this latest in the series, which is also the first to be released in about nine years.*

Working Conditions at Konami Under Scrutiny

Things just seem to be getting worse for Konami these days. Not only do they have the PR disaster that came along with getting rid of Hideo Kojima, which wasn't helped at all by the announcement of that weird **Silent Hills** slot machine, but it now looks like some company insiders are leaking details about the working conditions there. To say they aren't good would be an understatement.

We've already heard rumours about how developers in the Kojima Productions team weren't allowed to connect to the web and could only send internal messages, but now another source is claiming that developers who don't have an immediate use are being put to work as security guards or as part of the cleaning staff. This apparently includes well-known producers as well as junior developers.

Furthermore, it appears that the company has taken to stalking its employees, if the source is to be believed. Cameras are said to line the hallways, with the intent being to watch employees rather than protect them. Furthermore, they now need to sign out with a time card when they go for their breaks, with any employees who are late having their names announced throughout the building. Something tells us that Konami are more than happy for said employees to work over their salaried hours though.

YouTube Gaming Launches

Whenever anybody has a halfway decent idea these days, you can usually bet that Google will not be far behind, assuming they aren't the ones who came up with it of course.

With the massive success of Twitch, coupled with its recent purchase by Amazon, it was only a matter of time before the company got into the streaming games business.

In fairness, the launch of YouTube Gaming isn't all that shocking a move by the company. After all, they were involved in a tough bidding war with Amazon for Twitch in the first place, so they obviously had interest beforehand. It will be very interesting to see where this leads over the next few years.

DESTINY Coming to the PC?

It was hyped as one of the first must-have games of the current generation of consoles and, regardless of its staying power, it's hard to argue that **Destiny** was anything other than a success in that regard.

So much so, in fact, that it looks like Bungie are looking to bring the property to PCs as well. Nothing is officially confirmed but, if a recent job posting is anything to go by, it must surely be happening.

For those who are interested, the rumours have come about after Bungie started looking for a PC Compatibility Tester. This generally means that they are looking to port a property to the PC, and the only major one they have right now is **Destiny**.

COMING SOON



PROJECT ZERO: MAIDEN OF BLACK WATER

PLATFORM: WII U
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 30TH

The Wii U actually has a couple of pretty solid games coming out soon, with Project Zero the pick of the lot for horror fans. The original game is still one of the most terrifying survival horror games out there and is well worth a play for anybody who hasn't had the privilege yet. Hopefully, Maiden of Black Water will continue that fine tradition. It's already scored some pretty decent reviews in its native Japan and you have the think that the Wii U peripherals will be put to good use as well.

COMING SOON



RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE, XBOX 360

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 13TH

PS4 owners are going to have to wait a little bit longer to get hold of this one, but Xbox One adopters will be able to get their hands on Lara in November. Figuratively, of course. Anyway, the game looks set to continue the good work started by the last one, so look for something that is similar to the Uncharted series while still providing a healthy slice of gaming action for fans of Lara. It's so good to see her back in the saddle after so many mishandled games from a decade or so ago.

Peter Moore Claims Gamers Speak Nonsense about On-Disc DLC

We are all aware of on-disc DLC at this point, right? It's that wonderful bit of premium downloadable content that is not only made available on the same day a game is released, but is also programmed onto the disc as well. It frustrates fans who see it as little more than a money-spinner for companies who aren't satisfied to simply take the money they earned from the original game.

If that's your line of thought, then EA's Peter Moore would like you to know you're an idiot. While he used much more polite language, he recently commented on the phenomena on on-disc DLC, stating that the complaint that people often have about content that has already been made being held back is nonsense.

He contends that this content wouldn't see the light of day if not for the DLC mechanism and that the discs usually just contain a piece of code that activates the chunk of game that forms the DLC to make it playable.

The second bit makes sense, the first... not so much. You can't release content on launch day and then claim it wasn't already created. After all, it's there! On launch day! You could make the argument that it's stuff that would have been cut without the mechanism of DLC, but that still doesn't make it any less frustrating, particularly if it's a piece of content that is integral to the game.

Moore also seemed quite happy about how EA only has 12 games scheduled for released in 2015, rather than the 70 a year they were publishing in when he joined eight years ago. This is an excellent thing to brag about, as we all know that the less choice we have in gaming, the happier we can be swallowing down the multiplatform, franchised gruel that EA are so keen to send our way. Seriously, how is releasing fewer games a good thing for the gamer? Sure, it's probably great within a business model where you also make a ton of money from each game thanks to DLC, but it's the sort of thinking that will lead to the death of creativity in the industry if left unchecked.

New DIABLO on the Way?

Much in the same way as Bungie's recruitment attempts are hinting at a PC conversion for **Destiny**, a recent job ad taken out by Blizzard is also pointing towards the possibility of more **Diablo** on the horizon.

The company is looking for an experienced Art Director for an as yet unannounced project. However, the company says it would be to said director's benefit if they have an understanding and passion for the **Diablo** franchise, which kinda suggests that they are going to be working on, well, the **Diablo** franchise...

As mentioned by the job posting, nothing has been announced just yet. Still, it seriously can't be anything else now, can it?



DRAGON AGE Epilogue DLC Announced

Fans of the latest **Dragon Age** will be happy to hear that BioWare are close to releasing a new DLC epilogue that takes place a couple of years after the events of the game.

According to Creative Director Mike Laidlaw: "It's something we haven't tried before. **Trespasser** tells an entirely new story, set two years after the main game. The story explores what it's like to be a world-saving organisation when the world no longer needs saving."

Sounds pretty interesting and it will be good to see more of the game after it returned the series to the pedestal it was on following **Origins** all those years ago. No pricing has been announced at the time of writing, but we do know that you will have to finish **Inquisition** to be able to play it.

BORDERLANDS Movie on the Way

They were recognised as some of the best games of the previous generation and now it looks like the **Borderlands** series is also making its way to the Silver Screen.

Lionsgate has announced that it is beginning work on a feature-length film, with Avi and Ari Arad acting as producers. Nothing else is known about the project as of this writing, outside of a short statement from Lionsgate that stated: "We'll make the movie with the same in-your-face attitude that has made the series a blockbuster mega-franchise."

We can't help but be reminded of the marketing executives talking with the artists about the creation of the Poochie character in that one Simpsons episode when we hear phrases like "in-your-face attitude." Still, a **Borderlands** movie definitely has some potential.

COMING SOON



STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT

PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 19TH

After all of the fears that **Battlefront** would be cancelled following Disney's takeover of the Star Wars licence, we are finally going to get our hands on the latest in the series. EA DICE are handling development studios, which we can assume will mean the studio gets dissolved if the game doesn't perform to expectations. Still, the game is going to offer a full reboot of the series, which is probably needed at this point, plus a bit of free DLC is coming gamers' ways in December as well.

COMING SOON



CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS III

PLATFORM: MULTIPLE

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 6TH

It's coming, so we might as well cover it. Yes, the latest regurgitated shooter from Activision's top franchise is on its way at about the same time as always, delivering much the same experience as always. Expect the story mode to be fairly pointless, the online play to be solid and include a few new features, and the graphics to be shinier given the improved hardware. Simply put, if you're a fan you don't need convincing and if you're not, there's probably a reason. Nobody can be unaware of the series at this point.

POKKÉN TOURNAMENT Coming to Wii U

Fans of the **Pokémon** series outside of Japan will probably be more than a little bit miffed that they haven't had the chance to experience **Pokkén Tournament**, which has been an arcade exclusive in its native country for a while.

Not anymore! At the recent **Pokémon** World Championships in Boston, it was announced that the game is coming to the Wii U and, best of all, it will be available worldwide, so no fans of the series need miss out.

If you haven't heard of **Pokkén Tournament** before, the best way to describe it is as a mash-up of **Tekken** and **Pokémon**. It sounds awesome and is apparently a ton of fun, so we have to admit we are a little excited for this one.

CHATROUETTE FPS Promises No Man Bits

We all know that when you head to Chatrouette you're going to see some man bits. Just like the tides, it is an inevitable fact of life that we have all come to expect.

However, if you can wade your way through all of that junk, you may just find a nifty little FPS that casts you as the main character. The clever little game places you in control of a space marine as he explores a church, finding weapons and taking on baddies in the process.

You simply have to type the word 'Start' if you happen to see the game, and the space marine will then do whatever the player asks. Within reason of course. It's a very clever idea and one that you may be lucky enough to see in action for yourself if you are willing to brave the depths of Chatrouette.

THE LATEST
GAMING RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



MAD MAX

DEVELOPER: AVALANCHE STUDIOS / PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT/ PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If ever there was a flawed gem to be singled out in this generation, it would have to be Mad Max. Sharply contrasting positive design aesthetics and the savage wasteland tone of the films, it simultaneously accomplishes so much but botches so many essential elements. As a result, this makes for a positive if very uneven experience.

The game follows Max at his lowest moment, robbed of everything during his travels across the Plains of Silence.

Ambushed by a group of War Boys led by Immortan Joe's successor, Scabrous Scrotus, everything from his iconic car to his very clothes are taken from him. Surviving against all odds, he strikes up an alliance with a hunchbacked mechanic by the name of Chumbucket, both to achieve his revenge and build the greatest vehicle to ever traverse the wasteland.

Fans of the series will immediately be content to know that Avalanche Studios

completely nailed the vehicular combat. Proving to be every bit as exciting, diverse and fast paced as you'd expect from the Just Cause developers, everything involving them is damn near perfect. This is the antithesis of Ride to Hell's utterly broken design, and jumping in and out of the car is smoother and far more entertaining than even the Batmobile elements in Arkham Knight. This is further backed up by a fantastic and dynamic modification system which allows you to completely remake your ride in an instant. Most importantly, however, the wasteland is absolutely breathtaking in its scale, design and techno-barbarian beauty. You'll not find a better designed or more vibrant post-apocalyptic world to roam around in any time this generation.

However, the game's chief flaw unfortunately stems from several elements which detract from the open world environment. The most obvious among these is the quest system, which manages to rival

Dying Light in its repetitive and oddly dull nature. This sadly goes hand in hand with a number of elements that turn the game into a relentless grind as you seek out scrap metal resources, bogging down the experience and sense of exploration. This might be fine if there was a real sense of accomplishment or survival in scavenging, but so often you're just left banging your head against a brick wall. Combine that with a problematic health system, and you're just left with a lot of missed opportunities.

Ultimately, how much you'll enjoy Mad Max comes down to your play-style in open world environments. If you're a mission-focused individual, then you're going to lose out. If you're someone who goes into Grand Theft Auto purely to muck about and go on rampages, give it a look but stick to the vehicles.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

★★★★★★ 6



UNTIL DAWN

DEVELOPER: SUPERMASSIVE GAMES / PUBLISHER: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT/ PLATFORM: PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In just about every respect, Until Dawn is a Quantic Dreams game until you realise David Cage wasn't in the directing chair. It retains many of his ideas from the games he has worked on, but Supermassive Games have opted to take things in a rather unique direction. Your choices made here aren't about what you do, but who is left by the end.

The story follows eight friends, visiting a mountain getaway to celebrate the winter.

However, as time progresses, things begin to take a sinister turn. As bodies start to pile up, the group begins to realise they are not alone on the mountain.

The use of genre is what makes it stand out so incredibly well. We have seen choice-driven experiences cover everything from crime dramas to political thrillers but never slasher horror, and Until Dawn embraces this wholeheartedly to its own benefit. As with every other game, the

core plot needs to railroad the main storyline despite changes, but there is added investment when you drop potential deaths into the mix. Reacting too slowly, making the wrong choice or misjudging a person can result in another murder, completely changing who is left by the end. This offers incredible impact and vastly more replay value than seen in other games.

While QTEs and interacting with items are core to the story, the game offers a few side elements to keep things interesting. First among these is the personality system. You can gauge how people will react based upon their general personality traits, which can be measured and judged via a stats screen. Interestingly, though, these can change with certain choices. Making daring decisions will increase someone's bravery, while others might make them more nervous in future events. Atop of this, the main action

itself is broken up by an interview with a psychiatrist and another individual, set a year after the event. Certain choices, decisions and points in this can alter what scares and secondary elements appear in the main story.

Until Dawn can sometimes be too cheesy for its own good. While it might be aiming for a Cabin in the Woods-style story, the archetypal nature of certain characters and a weaker second half do lessen the experience. The visuals can also be hampered by some surprisingly awkward camera angles, and the QTE system can prove to be occasionally infuriating with some difficult or abrupt signals.

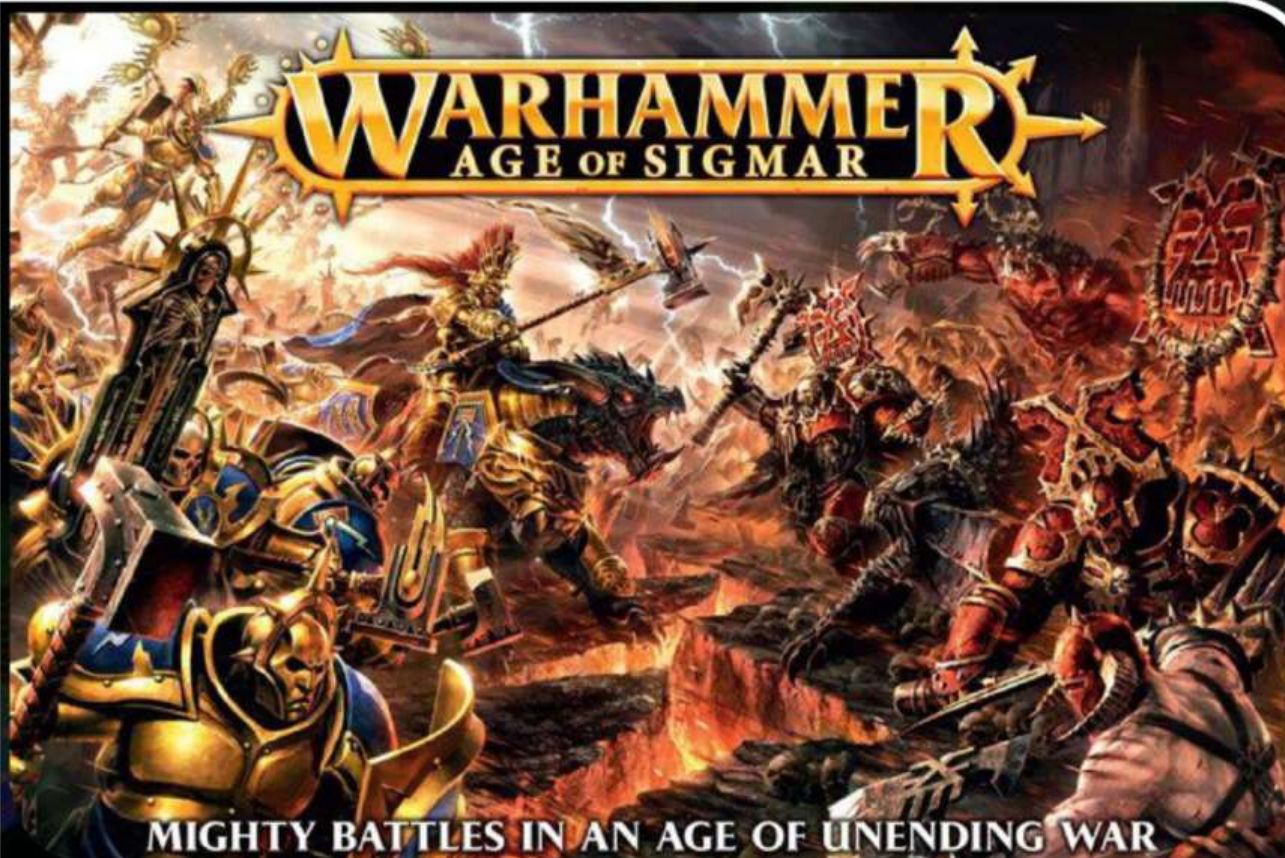
How much you'll love this one will depend upon your taste in horror but, to anyone who adores '90s to early 2000s horror, this is easily a day one purchase.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

★★★★★★ 8

ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU
THROUGH THE
REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



MIGHTY BATTLES IN AN AGE OF UNENDING WAR

It's been pretty busy at the Secret STARBURST Thunderdome recently, as there have been all sorts of exciting developments in the world of tabletop gaming recently.

Online one-stop shop for gaming downloads DriveThru RPG have received some pretty heavy criticism for some recent actions. The site allows third-party games creators to sell PDF files via their site. It's a popular service and a major source of revenue for a lot of indie games creators. One company, called Skortched Urf Studios, produces a game called *Black Tokyo*, which is inspired by the anime horror subgenre called hentai. Sexual violence is a central element of hentai and a recent supplement, which I won't name, featured sexual assault as its main plot point. This had the gaming community up in arms. Many other games designers have pulled their products from DriveThru RPG in response. Skortched Urf Studios have since withdrawn the supplement and DriveThru RPG will be implementing measures to report offensive products. The whole affair has left many gamers with a bad taste in their mouths, as

some feel the managers of DriveThru could have responded more swiftly and decisively. It's likely that this won't be resolved fully any time soon and we should expect to see other online gaming download businesses with stricter criteria spring up soon.

On a more cheerful note, it may have passed you by, but Games Workshop have abandoned their existing *Warhammer Fantasy* setting in favour of something new and shiny: *Age of Sigmar*. The response has been less than positive from the established fan base. Back in the eighties, the old *Warhammer* world was hastily cobbled together from whatever fantasy tropes happened to be in the room at the time. Michael Moorcock's *Melniboné* books, *Dungeons and Dragons*, and *Call of Cthulhu* were highly popular at the time, so the chaps in the brand new Nottingham headquarters threw ideas from those in. The appropriately named Old World was a mix of some bad puns, a little bit of xenophobia, some terrible jokes based on history and a whole horde of orcs, elves, dwarves and other clichés. Countless rules revisions, source books and novels later and the result

was a fairly dense world that had only barely been explored in depth.

Then came *The End Times*. Or to put it another way, Games Workshop decided to wring every last drop of interest out of the Old World whilst finishing off all the storylines and plot threads they'd left hanging for years. Finally, Gotrek the Slayer got to die in glorious battle and of all the mad schemes of various villains came to fruition. For a short while, the *Warhammer Fantasy* world broke out of its static and boring status quo as piles of very cool plot twists started happening. Nagash, one of the setting's big bad horrors, returned, the dead rose, and the elves got their act together and started using their cool super weapons and so on. In the end, the forces of chaos blew it all up. Except weirdly, the god Sigmar, who apparently got fired into the cosmos clutching onto the remains of the Old World.

It's hard not to picture this like something out of a *Looney Tunes* cartoon. World blows up, and there's Sigmar, God of order and humanity, flying into space like Wile E. Coyote after one of his plans has gone hilariously wrong. The storyline



gets sillier from that point on. Sigmar meets up with a space dragon (yes, really) and helps form a whole new plane of existence. *Age of Sigmar* is not so much set on a single planet but a bunch of alternate realities separated by portals. These 'realms' are divided by concept – you get Heavens, Shadow, Death, Fire, Beasts, Light and so on. The last big realm is Chaos, of course. There are four factions: Order, Death, Destruction and, again, Chaos. This is a wargaming setting, so it's all skewed to the mega violence. All the various races have been given new (and easy to copyright) names as well. This is unlikely to stop people from calling an ape-like, piggish ugly green humanoid an orc, even if Games Workshop insist it's called an Orruk. Oh, and Sigmar now sits on a Golden Throne, much like his science fiction equivalent from *Warhammer 40,000*.

Speaking of recycled ideas, bits of the Old World still exist in this new setting, mostly so you can keep playing with your old models. The rules for using your old models are free to download (as are all the rules). The rules are a bit silly; they're filled with in-jokes and are biased toward social play. The new game has no points balancing system. The idea is that you get a bunch of models out and play the games you feel most comfortable with. On the plus side, this is an amazing

and bold step; Games Workshop have created a social wargame that has placed fun (rather than winning) at its core. On the other hand, it's really annoyed many older gamers as it leaves play balance up to the individual. Number crunching and rule reading are part of the hobby for many, it seems.

Games Workshop are also disappearing from the high street. Sort of. They're going to rename all of their stores *Warhammer*, which makes sense as that's what a lot of people call the shops anyway. The company does seem to be restructuring itself quite a bit at the moment. Does this mean we could see *Age of Sigmar* themed video games and RPGs in their stores? Time will tell.

Talking of RPGs, the *Vurt* RPG has been successfully funded. Based on the surreal cyberpunk books by Jeff Noon, *Vurt the RPG* promises to be flexible, unusual and very pretty to look at. We haven't seen much of the game mechanics as yet, but we have high hopes it can turn one of the more interesting fictional settings created in recent times into a playable game.

The appropriately-titled Spartan Games launched their game *Halo: Fleet Battles*, *The Fall of Reach* last month and goodness me it is fun. Just when you thought that *Star Wars: Armada* was going to be the definitive space battle game of the age, something comes along



and surprises you. For a start, you get a lot more space ships, 49 in total. They aren't painted or even assembled, but that's part of the point. *Halo* is a game aimed more at those looking to get into wargaming as a whole hobby, rather the plug-in-and-play approach of *Armada*. It's also much more about the epic space fleet action, with battle groups duking it out in space. Fighter and boarding actions are reduced to counters; this is space ship battles on a much wider scale than *Armada*. It's just as fun, though it sacrifices finesse for crunchy cinematic action. Spartan is also working on a regular wargame set in the *Halo* Universe, where you'll get to have models of Master Chief and the like running around on your table.

Talking of space ships, *Wave VII* for the *X-Wing Miniatures Game* is now out. I haven't had a chance to play with any of the ships yet, but the *K-Wing* and *Hound's Tooth* both look sweet. The latter is for the Scum and Villainy faction and will let you field everyone's favourite reptilian bounty hunter, Bossk.

Wizkids have launched more Marvel Comics themed *HeroClix*, this time focusing on Nick Fury and Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. Some of the pieces are nice (the Hulk Buster Armour looks fab) and we're hoping that this will mean that they'll re-release play maps for S.H.I.E.L.D. bases and a Helicarrier. The rumours of a full model Helicarrier seem to remain wishful thinking by the fans. I don't know if we should be relieved though; that thing would be huge.

And finally, we're wishing the best of luck to Kyy Games, who are re-launching their *Cabals: The Board Game*. It's a 1930s occult secret society game; imagine flappers with magic powers taking on yetis and ancient cave-dwelling monsters. It sounds like a particularly surreal episode of *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* to us, but the game design looks solid so it should be fun.

Ed Fortune can be tweeted at @ed_fortune and contacted via ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com



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WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM
AROUND THE WEB
THIS MONTH WITH
JACK BOTTOMLEY



STAR WEARS

Now we have a major scoop for you here at STARBURST, because - ready for this - there is a new **Star Wars** film coming out. That's right, a new **Star Wars** film is in cinemas this December, we can't believe it has not been promoted more either! In all seriousness, though, you would have to have been living under a rock on Dagobah to have not have felt a disturbance in the force. There may still be plenty of time before **The Force Awakens** hits cinemas but the merchandise has already started marching in and the troopers over at alltheheroes.co.uk have got in on the action with this range of new shirts that are ready to pre-order for release on October 5th.

Making up the range of shirts are five different designs. You can opt for the traditional **Star Wars** Logo, or if you are a fan of the armoured clan you can get the Troop Leader shirt design. However we don't think we are exactly searching our feelings by guessing that most of you will be going for one of the three designs inspired by the cross-saber wielding, masked, big bad Kylo Ren. There is a repeated motif and a First Order stance design, but by far our favourite is the red and black Ren shirt. Republic credits will do fine...

STAR WARS VII (TROOP LEADER) T-SHIRT, STAR WARS VII (LOGO) T-SHIRT,
STAR WARS VII (KYLO REN STANDING) T-SHIRT,
STAR WARS VII (KYLO REN REPEAT) T-SHIRT,
STAR WARS VII (KYLO REN FIRST ORDER) T-SHIRT- £11.75 EACH
ALL AVAILABLE FROM ALLTHEHEROES.CO.UK



COMFY THRONES

To say that **Game of Thrones** has done well would be as big an understatement as saying the show features the odd death. George R. R. Martin's literary opus has gone past domination of the page and gone on to dominate the TV screens all across the world. The fanbase has been growing, as has the epic scale of each passing season of the show, so as we eagerly await the loss, bloodshed and action of the next wing of this tale, why not take a deep seat and think about everything we've seen so far. To do that, though, you might want a cushion - but not just any cushion, how about one of these **Game of Thrones**-inspired cushions from vintage-geek.myshopify.com, which come in a variety of well put-together designs that should please just about any sector of fan to emerge from the show. Perfect for making that aggressive-looking throne a little cozier.

**GAME OF THRONES CUSHIONS - £12 EACH
AVAILABLE FROM
VINTAGE-GEEK.MYSHOPIFY.COM**



ATTACH-ON TITAN AND POKÉBALL & CHAIN

When discussing fandom and material that has taken centre stage, you would be foolish to ignore the impact of Hajime Isayama's manga series **Attack on Titan**. The series has inspired an equally successful and acclaimed anime series and gone on to become a global phenomenon, inspiring a live action film and video games. As of July this year, over 52.5 million copies of the manga have been sold. So with a brand this distinctive, is it any wonder there is some lovingly crafted merch out there? Over on etsy.com we found a cracking set of handmade leather keyrings inspired by Titan, created by OdinsForge. They come in four varied designs and are a bargain price piece of gear.

However, some of you may remember a time before Titan, when our interest was piqued by the likes of Pikachu. We are of course referring to Satoshi Tajiri's **Pokémon**, which turns 20 years old this year! Tajiri's tale of humans training and catching creatures with special abilities has been the stuff of numerous childhoods. How many of us out there whiled away the hours trading our cards on the playground or tinkering with our Game Boys at home and humming that infectious theme tune of the anime series. To this day Pokémon is still beloved but whatever your generation, this simple but thoroughly effective handmade Pokéball necklace is the perfect way to carry your childhood round your neck. Made by Cute and Quirky Girl and available on etsy.com (in a selection of different colours too), "Catching em' all" has never been so easy!

**ATTACK ON TITAN KEYRINGS - £5.00 EACH
AVAILABLE FROM ETSY.COM**

**POKEBALL NECKLACE- £7.00
AVAILABLE FROM ETSY.COM**



CRAVEN MORE FREDDY

Now if you cast your minds back to Issue 416 (or just open it up, we're sure it is sat there on your table right now) you may remember the great Freddy Krueger knife-glove belt buckle. Well, far be it for **Watto's Emporium** to be repetitive, but in the time between issues, STARBURST was deeply saddened to hear of the passing of iconic horror filmmaker Wes Craven [see page 8]. Craven helmed **A Nightmare On Elm Street**, among many other influential works including **The Hills Have Eyes**, **The Last House On The Left** and of course the ground-breaking **Scream** series. So to celebrate Craven's most legendary creation here is another belt buckle, this time showcasing the fried-faced dream stalker in his entirety, once again from the fine folks at beltsbucklestees.com. R.I.P Mr Craven and thank you for the sleepless nights and fun frights!

**FREDDY KRUEGER BELT BUCKLE-
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BELTSBUCKLESTEEES.COM**

STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE



WORDS: ED FORTUNE
PHOTOS: ANNE DAVIES

Now in its third year, *Nine Worlds* seems to be growing stronger and stranger.

The 'Geekfest' event can be best described as a training weekend for the deeply geeky. With fencing classes, training sessions on publishing and media handling, talks, panels and stage shows, as well as entire rooms dedicated to knitting, it's easy to see why it's so popular.

Nine Worlds is an interesting mix of old and new. It has the 'volunteer and panel' structure that those who go to the so-called 'traditional' conventions like Eastercon and Worldcon will be familiar with. Its core feature is lots of rooms populated by those with something special to say on fan-related topics, attended in large numbers by those with similar interests. What's different is the range of subjects; *Nine Worlds* concentrates on things that will appeal to many different types of geeks and runs multiple tracks on very diverse subjects. It's not afraid to be different, odd, and controversial, and this attracts people who would not normally attend this sort of event.

Yet again, the written word dominated the event. The main track was easily 'All the Books', and guests included the likes of Laurell K. Hamilton, Lavie Tidhar, Ed Cox and Sarah Lotz. Highlights included a rather

brilliant panel on the nature of dystopia, an in-depth look at Gothic literature and a rather fun discussion on sex in fantasy in the later part of the Saturday. Paul Cornell was also on top form throughout this track and the 'Comics versus Books versus Video Games versus TV' panel was a foregone conclusion; it was on the books track, after all. This year also saw the launch of the Young Adult track, which focused solely on this growing category of novels. The YA section was essentially an extension of the books track, but a much needed one.

The comics track featured some brilliant panels and talks, and was yet again distinct and unique, drawing on both the more mainstream aspects of comic books as well as the indie angle. The creative writing and fan-fic tracks worked very well together, providing a strong source of training and inspiration for those looking to write more.

Tolkien, *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek*, and *Supernatural* all had their own tracks this year and though they suffered slightly from a limited guest list, made up for it in variety, by digging deeply into the things that inspired those shows. For example, the *Supernatural* track had a guest speaker who was an expert on historical cases of demonic possession, which nicely tied into the show. The *Star Trek* track provided great insights into how the UK regards the show and the Tolkien track wasn't afraid to be highly critical of its beloved source material. All fascinating and engaging stuff.

The LGBTQAI+, History, Technology, Feminism and Scepticism tracks also all dug into their topics with a mix of joy and fascination. The guests and attendees dove into the whole world of geeky information with relish and this enthusiasm was infectious throughout.

Entertainment in the evening came in various forms; we got a shortened version of the stage play *Knightmare* on the Friday, and Saturday furnished us with both the Gemmell Awards and Paul Cornell's 'Only A Moment' panel show, a version of the *Chatterbox* parlour game made famous by the BBC's *Just a Minute*. Cornell is an old



hand at hosting this game, and though there were a few regrettable hiccups, it ended on a hilarious high note with Joe Abercrombie attempting to sing 'Button Moon'. Sunday featured another stage comedy show and, of course, a quiz at the end. There was even a filk session. Filk is something you only ever find in conventions like this; it's a strange blend of folk music and pop culture, which isn't to everybody's taste.

This year's events did suffer from some minor set-backs. The hotel venue hosting the event seemed ill-prepared for the large groups of relatively young people, and didn't seem prepared to cope with multiple and diverse needs. Attendees complained of high bar prices and low quality services, and the organisers have already declared that *Nine Worlds* 2016 will be in a different place. Though it seems highly likely that it will stay in London; that is part of the event's appeal.

Mostly, however, this was a strong and significant event in the UK geek calendar. If you've ever been to a comic or film con and wondered if there was more to it than standing in a queue for a signing or shopping, then you should book for 2016's *Nine Worlds* and see how different these things can be.

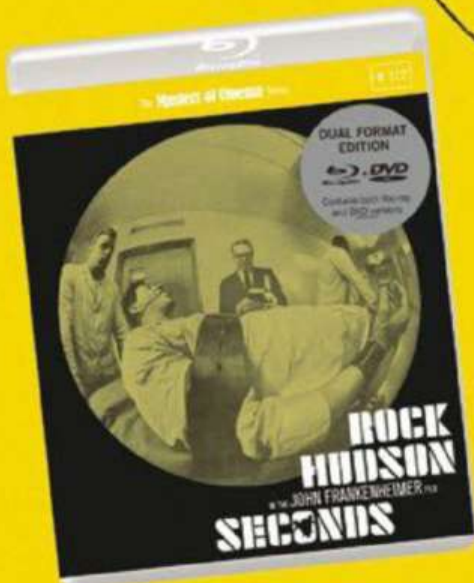
For more info, head to nineworlds.co.uk.



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PAUL MOUNT'S



With the hottest new US shows now debuting in the UK almost within hours of their stateside broadcast, this month we take a look at a handful of mid-temperature shows which have taken longer than usual to cross the Atlantic...

I wasn't really sure I'd approve of **Agent Carter**... sorry, **Marvel's Agent Carter**. The MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe, keep up) has done a brilliant job of introducing its superheroes, developing their storylines across a range of sequels and cross-pollinating characters and concepts to create a rich and generally rewarding web of interlinked films. In short, Marvel at the movies rocks. But Marvel on TV... well, that's been a bit more troubling...

I bailed out on **Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** halfway through the first season and I regret nothing. I'm told that the show has improved in leaps and bounds but its viewing figures remain pitiful and I'm convinced that ABC won't pull the plug (Season Three arrives later this year) purely because they don't want to be seen as the first to kick a chink in Marvel's hitherto untarnished entertainment armour. Netflix's **Daredevil** was a triumph, of course, and hopes are high for all the other Netflix Marvel-themed series currently in the works. Fortunately, we can also add ABC's **Agent Carter** (I'm really not going to be precious about the **Marvel's Agent Carter** bit) to the Marvel TV hit list purely because its eight-episode first season (just aired on FX in the UK) was such a lot of bright, breezy, fun.

Pre-**Daredevil**, the problem with Marvel properties on the small screen was just that - they were small-screen. With Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans and co. hardly likely to be inclined to rock up in a forty-minute TV episode in our lifetimes (yes, I know Samuel L. Jackson has done TV duty as Nick Fury, thanks), Marvel TV shows couldn't help but feel a bit second-rate. Shorn of the big budgets, lavish FX and costumed big names from the cinema franchises, Marvel on TV just looked cheap

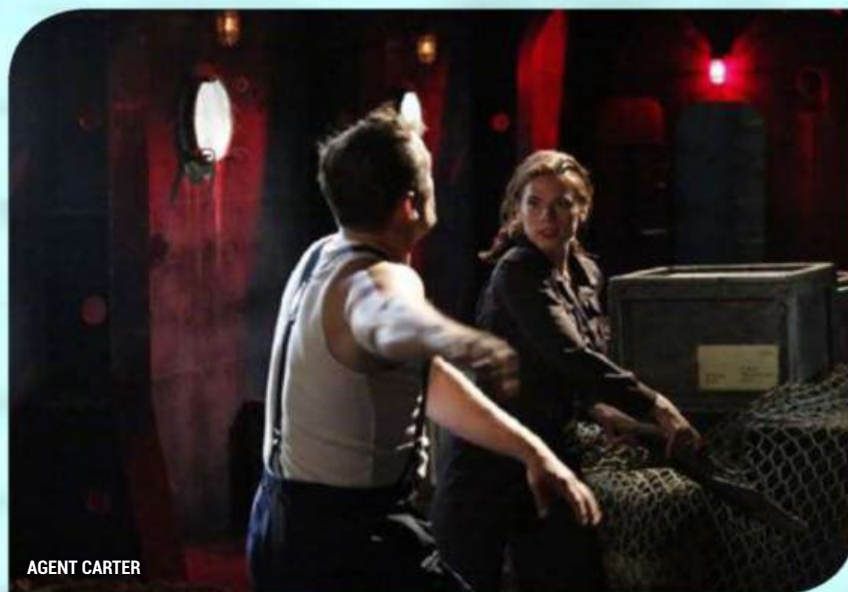
and uninteresting, bit players flung centre-stage because the leading men and women are never going to turn up. So my hopes weren't high for **Agent Carter**; a series based on the 1940s exploits of the girl Captain America left behind? I'm not sure what was louder, my snorts of derision or the sound of the barrel being scraped.

Happily - and not for the first time - I've been proved wrong. The first series of **Agent Carter** was gloriously entertaining, a big, brassy, retro Boy's Own adventure (starring a lady!) full of mad scientists with dodgy Russian accents, deadly weapons, espionage and subterfuge and lots of high-kicking action and wise-cracking. In short, a delicious concoction that works because it takes the Marvel TV formula,

bends it out of shape and twists it into something much more interesting and arresting. With just eight episodes to play with, **Agent Carter** doesn't hang around. It sets itself up, sets itself off, and then flies like a rocket; there's no flab or filler here, the series rattles along and yet packs more into its eight episodes than most shows that have the luxury of twenty or more episodes to tell their tale.

A year or so after Steve Rogers plunged to his apparent death at the end of the first **Captain America** movie, Peggy Carter (the effortlessly sassy and really quite brilliant Hayley Atwell) is moving on as she comes to terms with her loss. She's ostensibly employed at a telephone exchange but she's secretly working as a (largely unappreciated) agent for the S.S.R. (Strategic Scientific Reserve, a sort of proto-S.H.I.E.L.D.). This is one of the show's slickest tricks; Peggy may not have a costume or any super-powers but she has her own 'secret identity', a dual life she tries to keep hidden at all costs. But her two worlds collide when she's contacted by her old chum Howard Stark (Dominic Cooper, cropping up at odd points across the series) who enlists our Peggy to find out who has broken into his secret research facility, stolen deadly super-weapons he's been developing and supplied them to the highest bidder. Stark is forced to go into hiding but he gives Peggy her very own sidekick in the form of his stuffed-shirt butler Edwin Jarvis (James D'Arcy), who both helps and hinders Peggy as she surreptitiously investigates the theft of Stark's inventions whilst trying not to rouse the suspicions of her misogynistic S.S.R. colleagues. Before long, Peggy's investigations bring her into conflict with the mysterious and powerful covert Soviet terrorist organisation known as Leviathan and a plot to acquire a very special possession of Stark's which has links right back to the very creation of Captain America himself.

Agent Carter is a wonderful breath of fresh air and it works partly because it's very clearly a part of Marvel's wider



AGENT CARTER

STARBURST

world. Fans will delight in the numerous references to the Marvel Universe from obscure characters like the Howling Commandos to Captain America (who appears via a couple of flashbacks to the end of his first movie), Leviathan, Howard Stark, and a trained assassin who appears to be an early version of the formidable Black Widow. But it also works beautifully as a standalone adventure series. It doesn't ram its continuity down its audiences' throat and it all hangs together and makes sense whether you've been collecting Marvel Comics since 1963 or just enjoyed one or two of the MCU movies. The show never drops the ball in its immaculate depiction of 1940s America and the scripts are clever, taut, witty (when appropriate), and action-packed, and in Agent Carter herself we have a proper, full-blooded female action hero – and that alone can only be a good thing. It's frustrating that the show couldn't sustain a decent audience in the US across its run but fortunately, sane heads have prevailed and **Agent Carter** will be back later this year in a new ten-part adventure set in Los Angeles. The show's not only a great ripping yarn in its own right, it's proof that Marvel on network TV can work if can just come out from the overpowering shadow of the film franchises and become something new and different in its own right. **Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** take note.

Z NATION

Perhaps the most surprising thing about **Z Nation** is that it took Syfy in the US five years to come up with their rip-off... sorry, their own version of AMC's stupidly popular **The Walking Dead**. The show comes from the deep, dark soul of The Asylum, who are never shy of jumping the gun and making their own pennies-and-buttons versions of forthcoming or recent cinema sci-fi blockbusters (**Transmorphers**, **Atlantic Rim** and **I Am Omega** are three that immediately spring to mind and I really wish they hadn't) as well as the lamentable **Sharknado**



franchise, so it's odd that it's taken them so long to come up with their very first regular bandwagon-jumping TV show. I suppose our luck had to run out sooner or later.

Z Nation has turned up in the UK on a channel called Pick (you'll find it right down the bottom of the TV menu but not as far down as the Welsh stuff – with apologies to Vic and Bob and the much-mourned **House of Fools**). We might feel entitled to expect the worst but in fact **Z Nation** isn't at all bad as long as you stick your brain into neutral and want absolutely nothing more from your zombie drama than zombie ass-kicking. Curiously, the show is much more of a comic strip than **The Walking Dead**, which is, of course, based on an acclaimed comic book series, so I can't help but find myself a bit confused. The premise is simplicity itself. After a zombie apocalypse, a mismatched group of military and civilians find themselves tasked with escorting a potential cure for the virus – a guy who has been bitten and savaged and yet hasn't succumbed – across a devastated United States to a Californian medical facility which might be able to isolate his

immunity and produce a humanity-saving vaccine. Meanwhile, the dying planet's plight – and the group's progress – is being monitored by a US military tracking station in the Arctic manned by one Citizen Z (the odd-looking DJ Qualls), who also uses the base's tech to help the group as they cross the hostile, zombie-infested landscape.

I've watched enough of **Z Nation** to get a feel for it, but I couldn't tell you the names of any of the lead characters without resorting to Wikipedia. The show's not interested in examining the human condition, the terrible things men do, or the horror and terror of living in a changed world with no rules à la **Walking Dead**; it's concerned first and foremost with coming up with ingenious ways of slicing, dicing, flattening, burning and generally doing away with zombies, and in that regard it's hugely entertaining. **Z Nation** has no pretensions about its mission statement and it's certainly not aiming to be An Important Show For Our Times like **The Walking Dead** (or its promising 'prequel' **Fear the Walking Dead** – but more on that one next month). Yet for all its idiocy, the anonymity and blandness of its core cast, and its lack of storytelling ambition (although one episode does feature a zombienado... well, it would, wouldn't it?), it's often an easier watch than **The Walking Dead** which, for all its worthiness, can be a bit of a slog sometimes. **Z Nation's** budget may be minuscule compared to the adventures of Rick Grimes and co. and yet its canvas is wider, its post-apocalyptic world is generally well-realised (and a refreshing change from **The Walking Dead's** diet of woodlands and railroad tracks) and its violence is impressively inventive. So whilst I'm not exactly recommending **Z Nation** as one of the 'great TV shows' or our times, I'm suggesting that it will at least give you a quick, brainless zombie fix in those months when **The Walking Dead** is off the air and cooking up the next serving of its own particular brand of relentless doom and gloom for its audience.



THE LAST MAN ON EARTH

ABC's single-camera sitcom **The Last Man on Earth** (a recent and belated addition to UK 'lads' channel' Dave's schedules) also concerns itself with the end of the world – the title sort of gives it away. But here the premise is simply the backdrop for a particularly American relationship sitcom which owes more to the cynical, bittersweet likes of **Seinfeld** or **Curb Your Enthusiasm** than the comfortable coffee shop cosiness of **Friends** or **Frasier**. Former **Saturday Night Live** regular Will Forte (who created the series) stars as Phil Miller (the

name's taken from the show's joint exec producers Phil Lord and Christopher Miller), the titular last surviving human following a virus which has wiped out every other living thing on the planet (and, it appears, made them totally disappear).

In the darkly comic pilot episode, Phil cruises the country looking for fellow survivors and entertains himself by blowing up cars, helping himself to priceless works of art and using swimming pools as lavatories. Eventually, he returns to his home town of Tucson, Arizona where, despite painting faces on sports balls for company, he drives himself mad with loneliness and is about to commit suicide when he stumbles across another survivor. And she's a woman. But the fizzy, eccentric and fastidious Carol (Kristen Schaal) isn't quite the woman of his dreams. In the interests of the future of the human race, Phil agrees to marry Carol – she's a very old-fashioned gal – but the following day, the beautiful Melissa (January Jones) turns up and she's much more to Phil's taste than the quirky Carol. What develops across the show's first thirteen episodes (a second season has been commissioned) is a pretty damned funny show about one desperate, tactless, occasionally vile man and his absolute selfishness and determination to get what he wants whatever the cost. Other survivors turn up across the series, including a love interest for Melissa (much to Phil's ferocious frustration) and his idyllic life as self-appointed 'President of the United States' starts to fall apart as Phil lies, cheats, undermines and does everything in his power to get his own way. In reality, we should find Phil detestable but the more appalling he is, the more he seems to win our sympathy. Like Larry David in

Curb, he baldly lies or says the wrong thing time after time and then makes a bad situation worse by refusing to admit what he's done and building up elaborate fantasies to justify his complete selfishness. As the community grows, Phil's grip on himself and his situation gets weaker and weaker – with, as they say, hilarious consequences.

The Last Man on Earth is a hoot and a half. The scripts are sharp and snappy and Forte's manic, near-psychotic Phil is matched by Schaal who is brilliantly bonkers as ditzzy Carol. January Jones brings the pretties as Melissa but precious little else – comedy clearly isn't her strength either – and Todd (Mel Rodriguez) is her unlikely but likable chunky love interest.

The pilot episode is obviously the show's big money show; following episodes see the cast moving into empty houses in a cul-de-sac in Tucson where it settles into its fiercely character-based comedy format. It's often foot-in-mouth TV, sometimes painful as we watch Phil dig himself into an ever deeper hole and painting himself as horribly self-obsessed and woefully unsympathetic. Yet despite his failings and his appalling behaviour, it's hard not to like him – even if it's because, worryingly, we recognise a little bit of ourselves in his conduct in a world where everything is free for the taking. But ultimately, **Last Man on Earth** is just a very smart, witty, imaginative comedy show and it reminds us how poorly served we are as us Brits face the very real and terrifying prospect of new series of **Mrs Brown's Boys** and **Citizen Khan**. We have a long way to go.

Contact me via the magic of email at paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing - @PMount

ALSO SCREENING



AMERICAN HORROR STORY: HOTEL

The fifth season of Ryan Murphy's perverse horror anthology centres around the mysterious Hotel Cortez. There's no Jessica Lange this time, but series regulars Sarah Paulson, Angela Bassett, Evan Peters and Kathy Bates are joined by Lady Gaga as the hotel's owner the Countess. That's right, Lady Gaga...

From October 20th on Fox

THE WALKING DEAD: SEASON SIX

More undead angst from Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) and his fellow zombie apocalypse survivors as AMC's huge smash hit returns for the first half of its latest season. This time, UK viewers will be able to enjoy (?) the US chat show **The Talking Dead** directly after the screening of the latest episodes.

From October 12th on Fox

SLEEPY HOLLOW: SEASON THREE

Fox's unlikely fantasy hit lost its way during its second season but the retooled third season will dispense with the presence of Orlando Jones' Frank Irving and the menace of the Headless Horseman and take the adventures of Ichabod Crane, alive and well in 21st century Sleepy Hollow, in some new directions.

From October 22nd on Universal



THE LAST MAN ON EARTH

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it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

Well, I guess my dreams of making it through the entirety of 2015 without a turkey were always a tad unrealistic, but for the past eight months it's been genre nirvana. Every month bringing a clutch of great movies and not one that I would have to bitch about. Ladies and gentlemen, I really hoped that a certain movie was not going to put an end to this run (even after the early whispers, and the news of the embargo), but it turns out that **Fantastic Four** is indeed a seriously abysmal movie, failing on any level to entertain fans and casual movie goers alike. It's a dour, boring, humourless film that not only fails to capture the essence of the characters, it actually makes you dislike them intensely. Turning fan favourite The Thing into a mass murderer with 43 confirmed kills is just one of the liberties taken with a film lacking in both story and any discernable filmmaking technique. Gone are all the goofy trappings, but anyone hoping for a Nolan approach will be equally disappointed. This is a Trankquilliser of a movie that is so bad that even Stan Lee refused a cameo.

The negative zone: a writer's gift. A place where the FF could face any number of outlandish threats is turned into a rocky terrain with a bit of green lava that seems to exist only to give the FF their powers. This is just the first of a long line of downgrades that make the entire affair irrelevant; offering a little bit of nothing for everyone. The cast are all rubbish, and seem like they wished they could have gotten work elsewhere. The plot is a miserable rerun of the origin from the 2005 Tim Story version, but with any sense of entertainment bleached out of it like a bad stain. The film is so badly edited that you constantly feel like you just missed something important (you didn't). There is a reason



IT'S ONLY SOME MOOBIES - The Inside Story of Josh Trank's FANTASTIC FOUR

for this, and for the fact that the tone and style completely changes for the last showdown with Doom (in common with the Tim Story movies, he is still not the Doctor Doom we *wanted* to see on screen). Even the ending is jarring when a bizarre moment occurs as the FF make a terrorist threat against the government. They demand a billion dollar base - or else! Then suddenly, they have their base and we switch gears for a hokey closing scene, trying to desperately build

a canvas for more of these anaemic outings. This is indeed going to be a very important movie for all the wrong reasons. To figure out how this could have ended up such a misfire we need to look into the phenomena that has been branded 'Trankgate'.

The Fantastic Four were in many ways the first unconventional super team. After receiving cosmic powers, they all shacked up together in the Baxter Building, and

operated under their own names with no secret identities. If you needed them you could just pop round and see them. Their adventures were equally divergent from many of their contemporaries, often involving outer space, some weird dimension, or the Negative Zone. The biggest bad in the Marvel Universe was their arch enemy Doctor Doom, and many of the most important stories took place on their watch, including the battle with Galactus that introduced the awesome Silver Surfer. The FF were very much the glue that held the Marvel Universe together. The outlandish visuals of Jack Kirby and the imagination of Stan Lee ran amok in this comic book. The uncanny Kirby imagery also allowed for a darker aesthetic to creep in, such as the tragic saga of Ben Grimm and his love for the blind artist Alicia. It was certainly not as cheesy or totally goofy as many would have you think. Sadly, his magic has yet to be transferred to the big screen, with a variety of factors and misfortunes getting in the way.

The FF movie saga began in the 1980s when Bernd Eichinger of Constantin Films bought the movie rights under a strange contract that in itself has created this ongoing curse that plagues the property to this day. Leading to continual pressure to quickly produce movies in order to feed the terms of this agreement. In 1992, Eichinger was coming up on the first of many dates that would require a movie to be made and released to prevent the rights from reverting back to Marvel. He hired Roger Corman to make a low budget *Fantastic Four* movie only three days prior to the reversion date. Corman made exactly the sort of disastrous flick you would have expected under these circumstances (although arguably his version did get Doctor Doom right), prompting Avi Arad at Marvel to buy the movie in order to destroy the prints and block its release for fear of damage to the property. To this day, it only exists on dodgy pirate copies in the public domain. It's an interestingly terrible viewing experience.

With *Spider-Man* and *The X-Men* proving that the time had finally come for superheroes at the movies to take the big bucks, a big budget *Fantastic Four* movie rolled into production, and after five changes of director, Tim Story brought them to the big screen with two outings: *Fantastic Four* in 2005, and *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* in 2007. Both movies made money, but fans were a bit harsh. I thought they were ok, but hated their version of Doctor Doom, who resembled a Sith Lord, but for all the flaws at least they *felt* like the FF from the comics. Once Marvel Studios

launched with their *Iron Man* movie, the relationship between Fox and Marvel began to deteriorate. Marvel interfered by blocking the use of some characters, and when Fox announced another FF movie in 2009, it was purely to deprive Marvel of the rights, as it was widely known they didn't even want to do another one. This bitterness reached its peak when Marvel offered to extend the time period for their rights to Daredevil in exchange for the rights to Galactus and the Silver Surfer. Fox refused and were unable to greenlight their new Daredevil movie in time, resulting in old hornhead ending up back with Marvel (and gifting us with one of the best TV superhero series ever made!).

On July 11th, 2012, Fox announced Josh Trank as the director of the new FF film, hot on the heels of his success with the movie *Chronicle*. A \$12 million picture that recouped an astounding \$126 million. Almost immediately, Trank was also announced as the director of one of the upcoming *Star Wars* anthology movies. His LinkedIn profile was certainly improving. The FF movie seemed in even safer hands when the excellent Mathew Vaughn came on board as producer, followed by Simon Kinberg as screenwriter. The race was on again to beat the dreaded rights reversion.

The first alarm bells sounded with the description of Trank's vision for the movie as dark, gritty, and grounded. Some fans were not impressed. Sadly, Trank took it badly and took to slagging off fans on Twitter. One tweet in particular compared the fans to a dog's rectum - a tweet that was quickly deleted at the behest of Fox. At this time it was leaked that Fox had seen the script and were looking around to replace Trank. The leak embarrassed Fox into keeping him, and insanely doubled down on their woes by announcing a sequel for release in 2017. These MBA types really know how to deal

with a problem...

It was relatively quiet for a short while but there were a few comments from the cast that caused tremors. Michael B. Jordan dismissed Kirby's costume designs as 'cheesy', and Kate Mara let slip that Trank had ordered them NOT to read the comics, as his version was not based on them! Unlike Fox, Marvel could clearly see the writing on the wall and cheekily blew the cast of the new FF movie to pieces in an issue of *The Punisher* comic, then actually cancelled the *Fantastic Four* comic that had been in continuous print since 1962. Severe measures to combat something Marvel saw as a problem.

Keeping a lid on Josh Trank and the troubled production became impossible when rumours from residents near the filming location in Baton Rouge surfaced on the infamous TigerDroppings forum. The rumours suggested that Trank would not turn up for shoots, and if he did would be drunk or high - or both! He would abuse the cast, in particular Kate Mara whom he would reduce to tears. Then the bizarre news broke that he had trashed his rented living accommodation, causing over \$100,000 worth of damage and prompting a direct apology from Fox President Jim Gianopulos. This matter was settled for an undisclosed sum in a civil action. Apparently all the damage was done by his small dogs, a fact few found remotely credible. Trank's behaviour also proved to be contagious, with an extra ending up in rehab after a night out at one of his late night parties, and actor Miles Teller performing scenes whilst completely off his head on the hard stuff.

OK, so things were 'complicated' on set, was the end result worth it? Apparently not. In January 2015, the fact that writer Simon Kinberg had been ghost directing to cover Trank's absence had got back to Fox, who were reeling from their viewing of the movie thus



Miles Teller struggles to recover after another late night out with Josh Trank

far. They considered it just to be a remake of **Chronicle**, prompting them to make a last minute attempt to salvage the mess. Fox injected a further \$20 Million and ordered a series of reshoots, involving some expensive set builds. Notably, Trank had stopped picking up the phone at this stage, and he was kept off the movie from this point on. In order to cover some of these costs, the 3D conversion was cancelled, despite Simon Kinberg previously stating in interviews that many scenes had been constructed with 3D in mind. It is widely believed that the end segment (end being the operative word here as Trank had the movie just stop. There was no ending) was directed by Mathew Vaughn, who had to be brought in from the first two weeks of shooting **X-Men: Age of Apocalypse** to rescue what was widely considered to be an impending disaster for Fox. You can actually tell when these scenes appear as Kate Mara (having changed hair style) is wearing a wig that makes her look like a dead hooker.

By May 2015, as all of these problems were becoming public knowledge, Disney sacked Trank from the **Star Wars** movie. Incredibly, not one fellow crew member, actor, or even close friend offered any public support for the man who was fast becoming a career liability. In fact, Simon Kinberg had been instrumental in lobbying Disney to remove him, as he was on the writing team for said movie. Max Landis, his co-writer on **Chronicle**, merely tweeted the word 'Karma' upon hearing the news. Jeff Sneider from 'The Wrap' went further by suggesting that the success of **Chronicle** was down to the writing talent of Max Landis, and some clever work by others in the cutting room (Trank had previously threatened to beat up Sneider for making some of this public!).

It actually does manage to get even worse at this point. Later in May, Trank decided to unleash his thoughts via a number of Internet forums, admonishing the fans for listening to gossip, and labelling veteran comic book legend John Byrne a neo-Nazi for suggesting that altering the ethnicity of existing characters was not as effective as writing genuinely convincing original characters of ethnic origin. The forums exploded further with a series of postings on the 4Chan bulletin board. Someone from the special effects team that worked with OTOY graphics studio went into great detail about the absurd behavior of Trank. This included the revelation that he was vetoed from having a size-changing Thing, and went on to confirm what a nightmare he had been to work with; to validate his status as a genuine insider, he confirmed that the 3D version had indeed been cancelled. A fact that was not public knowledge at the time.

Trank responded in person. He confirmed that he had been distant on set, but

blamed it all on the pressure put on him by Fox and Vaughn. He ranted on about how we were not getting a comic book adaptation but his unique vision. A combination of sci-fi, space, and body horror. He was going to push the boundaries. "*This is Earth-Fox, not Earth 616*", he proclaimed. He went on to explain that he was high and didn't give a fuck, and that Simon Kinberg was an anally retentive "*dick*" overly possessive about the characters he writes. He also defended the damage done to his accommodation, but that he did not regret taking his dogs along on the shoot. 20th Century Fox quickly descended on the Internet with an avalanche of cease and desist orders against any site or publication covering these bizarre outbursts. During this purge by Fox, even STARBURST received a harshly worded rebuke for featuring an early CGI rendering of The Thing.

Trank gave some insight into his mental state during all of this in a July 18th article in the L.A. Times stating, "*I think maybe there is a part of me that needs adversity from the rest of the world in order to feel motivated to want to prove people wrong*". Yeah, good luck with that last bit. He went on to explain that these feelings of having to prove himself came from having large man boobs in high school. I can totally understand if you think I am making all of this up at this point. I'm typing almost in a state of disbelief.

In the end, **Fantastic Four** opened to a tsunami of bad reviews and terrible box office. Trank, of course, had to cap off this whole sorry saga with a final tweet. "*A year ago I had a fantastic vision of this. And it would've recieved great reviews. You'll probably never see it. That's reality though*". Believe us, Mr Trank, we've all seen enough!



The **Fantastic Bore** is regrettably not the only box office bomb to detonate in August, and now the figures are in they don't look great for the Guy Ritchie version of **The Man from U.N.C.L.E.**, which is a shame as it is a slick spy-fi movie, even if many are dismayed at its lack of adherence to the mythos of the TV series. I really enjoyed the film and its streamlined approach. I became a fan of the TV series after catching some of the movies when they were shown on TV in the '70s and '80s. To call them movies was a bit of a stretch to be fair, as they

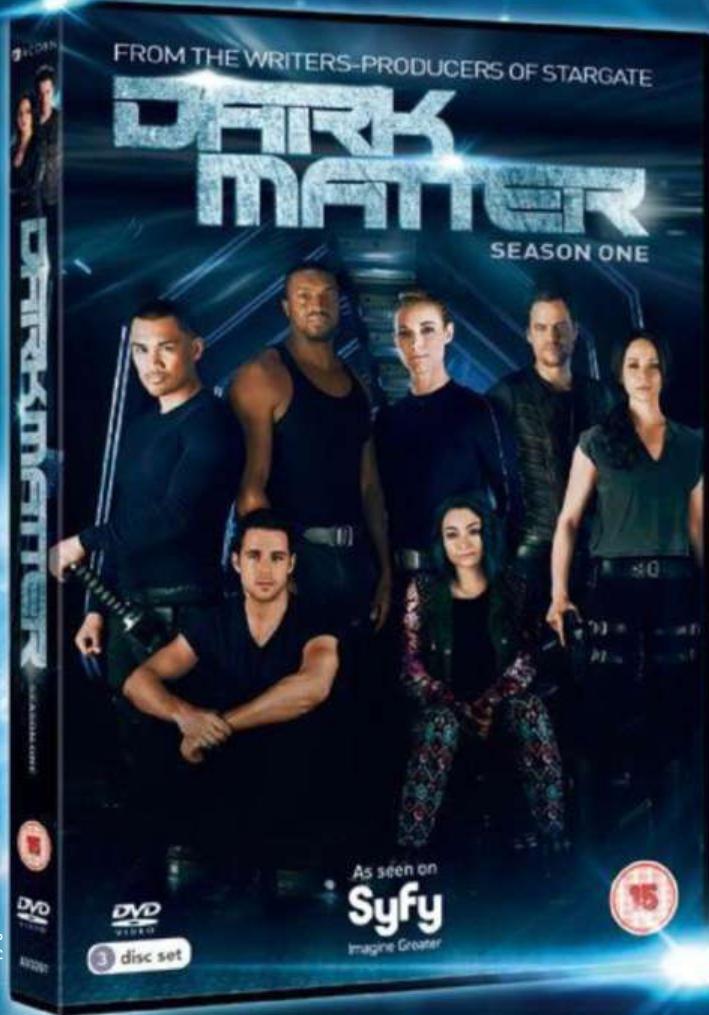
were only two-part stories pieced together that the US audience had already seen gratis. I took to the characters, and I loved the idea of U.N.C.L.E. headquarters being accessed via the Del Floria's tailor shop. The triangle ID badges, the communicator pens, and all the mythology drew me in. Clearly Ritchie was going to have to pare back some of this and the fact that he failed to include any of it, instead providing the origin story that we didn't really need, has irked many fans. All that aside, **The Man from U.N.C.L.E.** is a very slick and stylish genre spy entry, and one that I enjoyed way more than I thought I would. The cast were superb, and much as I hated Cavill in **Man of Steel**, I thought he made a decent fist of Napoleon Solo. Whereas Cavill did a fairly straight take of his character, Armie Hammer did bring something new to Illya Kuryakin, and played up the Russian side way more than McCallum did. Both of the characters were amped up and given back stories which worked quite well. This Solo was actually serving a five-year deal to work for the CIA in exchange for his freedom. I also really enjoyed Hugh Grant's version of Alexander Waverly, and the outrageously flirty Alicia Vikander as Gaby Teller, the key character in the whole saga.

Setting the movie in the cold war era and not placing them in a modern tableau worked really well. The costumes in particular made the whole aesthetic play out to perfection. As for Daniel Pemberton's incredible soundtrack, well, that is the real jewel in the crown. I recommend you pick it up even if you can't be bothered seeing the movie. It really is *that* good (although I do think it's unforgivable not to have used the iconic Goldsmith theme tune. The **Mission Impossible** franchise never made *that* mistake!). On the whole, **U.N.C.L.E.** was a fun ride from start to finish. If you are an outsider, it probably helps as you can come to this clear of any unrealistic expectations, but if you are a fan of the TV series, and you are willing to just accept this as a standalone movie, then there is a lot to enjoy. It was also clear from the end credits that some of the sorely missed mythology would be included in the follow-up that now will probably never happen. Why did it bomb so badly?

I would say it is a combination of lack of a big lead in the main roles (Cavill and Hammer are not exactly household names) and a really poor ad campaign. Whatever the reason, one of my favourite shows will probably just fade away into obscurity. That is the real cost of reboots of this type, and that's a real shame. ✦

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